Hi everyone and welcome to day 2 of our annual CDH convening here at the AAP Headquarters! We are really thrilled to have you here to learn about community water fluoridation and arm you with tools on how to build state teams to support your efforts.

For those of you that don’t know my face, but probably know my email address, my name is Lauren Barone (lbarone@aap.org) and I manage the oral health activities here at the AAP and oversee the great work that Hollis and Heather do for the Campaign for Dental Health.

Hollis titled my remarks Speaking with One Voice and when she said that it reminded me of the first task I had when I took the position here at the Academy our oral health work. At that time, the AAP had already done a lot to raise the awareness of oral health issues for children with pediatricians and others. We had a well-established Section on Pediatric Dentistry that was charged with writing policy and helping pediatricians to understand the clinical issues related to oral health in primary care. We also had the Oral Health Initiative, an MCHB funded program that aimed to train pediatricians and others about preventive oral health services and to begin to engage the primary care community in a discussion about how it could impact the oral health crisis we were seeing in our children.

So my task, from day 1 of starting this job was to integrate the Section on Pediatric Dentistry (made up entirely of pediatric dentists) and the Oral Health Initiative (made up of pediatricians, family physicians, other health professionals, dental providers, and government agencies) so that they could speak with one voice and really create change both within the organization and outside these walls.
That work was challenging and really created a true culture shift here at the AAP around oral health. It was no longer that dental meant a dentist or that pediatricians could look past the teeth and to the tonsils. We had recognized that the only way we were going to improve the oral health of our children was to be open-minded and accepting of the idea that oral health is everyone’s business, that oral health affects overall health, and that we needed to speak with one voice to continue to change the perception of what it meant to be healthy and what it means to take care of a child in a pediatrician’s office.

It also reminded me of a conversation that was had about the idea of AAP taking on the Campaign for Dental Health as a priority within the AAP Section on Oral Health. Much like the integration of the Section on Pediatric Dentistry and the Oral Health Initiative we again had an instance of dentistry working in its own silo and public interest type groups – like the Pew Charitable Trusts, working in its own silo. It became clear that there needed to be a convener to bring all of these important partners together on a topic that they all actually could agree on! As we learned more about CWF and its proven track record of effectiveness and safety, its impact on health equity, and the constant defending of the practice that needed to take place, we understood why the AAP might be the place to do this work….and the rest is history.

As the campaign has grown we have educated pediatricians and others about the importance of fluoridation, have improved the presence of pro-fluoridation messages and resources online and on social media platforms, and have grown an incredible network of partners with which we can speak with one voice to support community water fluoridation.

Lastly, it reminded of me the song, Better Together, by Jack Johnson, that my husband and I danced to at our wedding and he has incorrectly inscribed on the inside of his wedding band as “Better Togther”…wrong spelling or not, the sentiment remains that we are better together.

So as you return home this afternoon with lots of new friends and tools to help you build or reinvigorate your state teams please keep three things in mind:
1. Dental doesn’t only mean the dentist – engage the dental profession, but also look for new opportunities to recruit unlikely voices to advocate for oral health and fluoridation.
2. This is hard work and a cultural shift so please lean on us and others for thoughts and ideas of how to bring groups together on this topic, that really, most agree on. and
3. Corny, but true, we’re better together or together.

I’d also like to encourage all of you to join the AAP Section on Oral Health. We are a vibrant and unique group here at the Academy. Our membership includes pediatricians, dentists, dental hygienists, nurses, and other health professionals who are working to improve children’s oral health and medical/dental collaboration. If you’d like more information about joining or all of the work we do around education, policy, and programs, please catch me in person today or by email (remember lbarone@aap.org) once you return home and I’d be happy to talk with you more about it and help you to join.

A part of the Section on Oral Health that will be key to your success in building state teams are our Chapter Oral Health Advocates. They are pediatricians in almost every state that work to train pediatricians and others about oral health preventive services and also are asked to advocate for oral health at the state and local level. They will be a key partner and the conduit to the AAP Chapter in your state as you work to defend community water fluoridation. Please take a few minutes to look up who your COHA is and reach out with a note of introduction. Thank you to our funders, the Dentaquest Foundation and the Arcora Foundation for making this event possible and giving us the opportunity to meet all of you. I hope you enjoy the rest of the meeting!

Thank you so much for coming and spending two days of your very busy lives with us.