For children who lack dental care, a toothache can be a huge problem—making it hard to concentrate in school and affecting their overall health.

Taylorville Memorial Hospital's 2015 community health needs assessment identified access to pediatric dental services as a high-priority need. To address the issue, hospital leaders spearheaded the creation of a workgroup with hospital staff, Taylorville Community School District officials, local dentists and community members.

The group partnered with "Miles of Smiles," a local organization that provides free dental checkups to schoolchildren across the state. When the program began in early 2017, Miles of Smiles referred five students in need of urgent dental care to the dental practice Central Illinois Smiles. The school district provided the students transportation to the practice, where they received free care.

Central Illinois Smiles has seen 13 patients since 2017 from Miles to Smiles at a cost of $4,969. The practice hasn't seen patients this year due to COVID-19 and school closures. The Taylorville Memorial Hospital Foundation has spent $12,557 and helped nine children who needed a higher level of care for their urgent dental care needs.

Taylorville Memorial is also committed to improving mental health. The hospital began offering training through Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), an international program that gives participants tools to assist individuals with mental illness. So far, over 70 people—including local law enforcement officers, medical professionals, faith leaders and educators—have completed MHFA's eight-hour course on identifying the signs of mental illness and helping individuals access community resources that can help them on the path to recovery.

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