

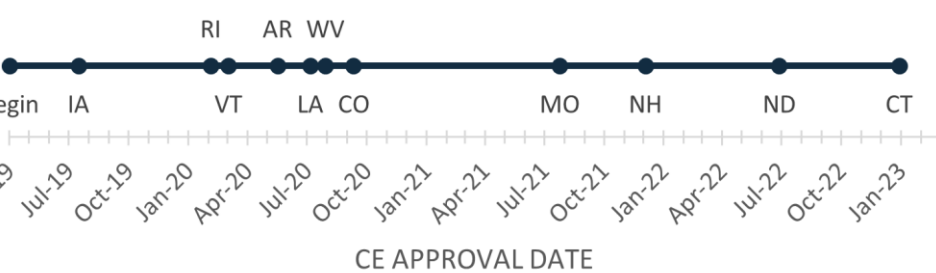
Continuing Education Credits for Water Operators: Is it Worth the Squeeze?

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BACKGROUND

Fluoridation Learning Online (FLO), a free resource designed to increase knowledge and refine skills to implement and maintain community water fluoridation, serves as CDC's primary training for state fluoridation program staff and water operators. In order to increase uptake, eleven DOH-funded states have certified FLO to provide continuing education credits (CE) to water operators.

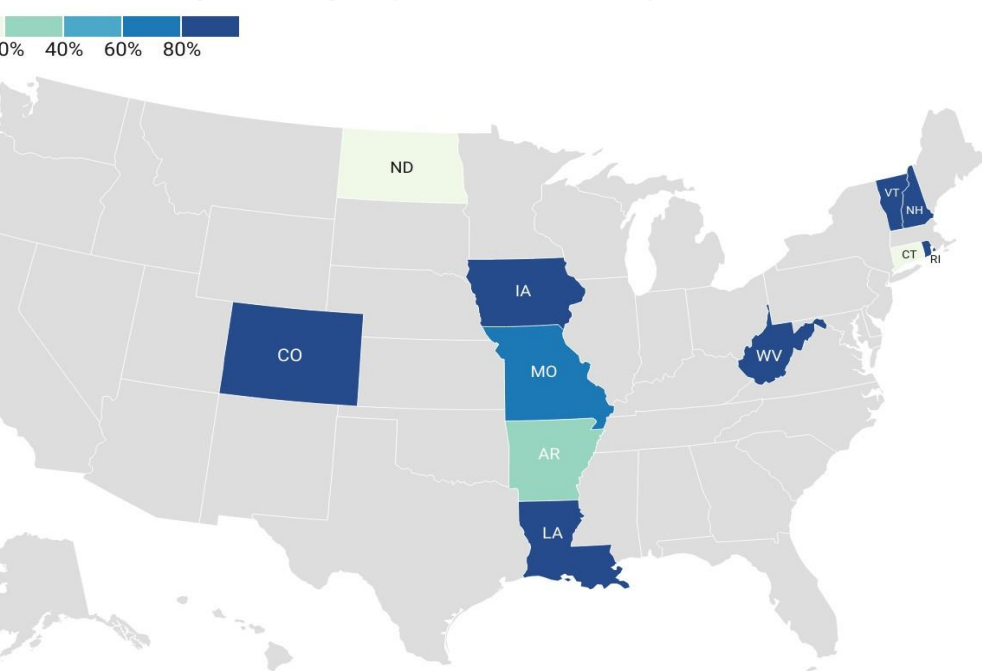
Water Operator CE Approval Over Time



METHODS

- CDC staff exported an MS Excel training roster from CDC TRAIN from 4/1/2019 to 2/15/2023. Data was sorted by:
 - Learners who did not self-identify as working for a municipal, county, or private system and duplicate registrations were removed from the analysis.
 - State and registration date to count registrations before and after CE provision in that state.
- CDC personnel conducted open-ended discussions with oral health program staff from selected states who worked through their state water quality agencies to obtain CE for FLO.
- Transcribed notes were analyzed for common themes regarding challenges, benefits, and lessons learned.

Percentage of Signups After CE Implementation



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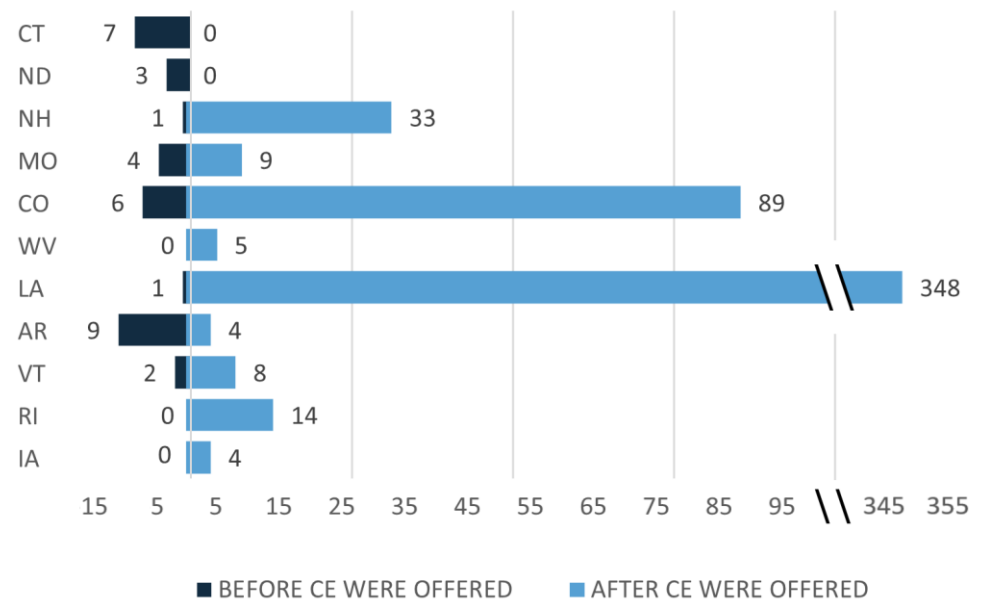
"We felt like if water operators were taking FLO, they're going to be more likely to fluoridate to the optimal level."



FINDINGS

- Eight of 11 states showed increased registrations after providing CE; 6 increased by >90%.
- Among the 547 registrants from these states, 513 (91%) registered after CE was offered in their state.
- Open-ended discussions among 4 states (NH, ND, RI, and VT) highlighted common themes of:
 - Increasing uptake by creating opportunities for water operators to obtain CE
 - Ensuring water operators were consistent with knowledge of community water fluoridation principles and practices.
- This analysis was limited due to high staff turnover in state oral health programs; many staff engaged in the CE approval process were lost to follow-up.

Number of Registrations Before and After CE



CONCLUSIONS

- States with water operator CE for FLO see increases in registration among those who identify as working for a water system; however, wide variation existed in the amount of increase.
- In addition to offering CE, states should explore outreach to increase awareness of the training.
- Strategies may include presentations at conferences, offering incentives, paid or earned media in trade publications, or using other water operators as "trusted messengers" to promote the training and the opportunity for CE.

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