

ORAL HEALTH

Background

By age nine, 50% of children have cavities in their primary (baby) or permanent teeth. On average, 34 million school hours are lost each year because of unplanned (emergency) dental care. One in five adults (21%) have at least one untreated cavity. Adults missed 183 million hours of productivity due to oral pain or unplanned dental visits and 60 million hours due to oral pain or dental visits of children or other adults in their care. Oral health also impacts chronic disease development. Those with gum disease are two times more likely to have or develop heart disease. Medical-dental integration between oral health and chronic disease prevention programs benefits patients and saves money. For instance, the U.S. healthcare system could save up to \$100 million a year if dental offices screened patients for diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol and referred them for treatment.

CDC Programs to Address Oral Health

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) currently funds 20 states to collect data on the burden of oral diseases to ensure that oral disease prevention programs are targeted to those at the highest risk. They also fund states to maintain and expand access to community water fluoridation and to administer programs that deliver dental sealants to high-risk children in school settings.

CDC's Division of Oral Health (DOH) provides leadership to improve the nation's oral health by:

- Supporting the integration of medicine and dentistry to increase access to care and improve care coordination for chronic diseases associated with poor oral health.
- Supporting national data collection through public health surveillance systems, funding state health departments' data collection on oral diseases, and providing data to researchers and the public.
- Contributing to the scientific knowledge regarding oral health and disease.
- Strengthening the workforce with a dental public health specialty residency training program.
- Promoting proven prevention steps to reduce disease, such as school dental sealant programs.
- Serving as the national leader in infection prevention and control for the dental community, creating guidelines as well as trainings and resources.

With increased funding, DOH could fund additional states and increase funding for currently implemented initiatives. Additional resources would allow DOH to update existing guidelines – focusing on new dental technologies – to better protect the health of patients receiving dental care in offices across the United States. With additional resources, CDC could advance partnerships between oral and medical providers, including promoting recommendations from a National Action Framework to support whole-person integrated care.

The Cost of Oral Health on the American Health Care System

- Over \$45 billion in U.S. productivity is lost each year due to untreated dental disease.
- In 2017, there were 2.1 million emergency room visits for dental emergencies. Medicaid pays for about 69% of these visits for children and approximately 40% for adults.
- Oral health issues are rare and highly preventable. For example, providing sealants to the 7 million children at the highest risk of developing cavities could save up to \$300 million in averted dental treatment costs.

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