The American Dental Association (ADA) urges you to cosponsor the “Action for Dental Health Act 2015” (H.R. 539), introduced by Reps. Robin Kelly (D-Illinois) and Mike Simpson (R-Idaho).

The bill would allow organizations to qualify for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) oral health grants to support activities that improve oral health education and dental disease prevention. The grants would also be used to develop and expand outreach programs establishing dental homes for children and adults, including the elderly, blind and disabled.

“This bill adds no additional burden to taxpayers,” said ADA President Dr. Maxine Feinberg. “Rather, it will redirect existing resources to the kinds of programs that are already proven to reduce and eliminate the barriers that prevent millions of Americans from achieving good oral health.”

H.R. 539 would support initiatives that have the greatest impact on dental access disparities, including:

**Volunteer Dental Projects**
Programs like Give Kids A Smile® and Missions of Mercy provide important platforms for dentists to deliver care directly to those in need.

- Each year, approximately 450,000 children benefit from 1,500 Give Kids A Smile events nationwide. Missions of Mercy events across America have served more than 100,000 patients, providing nearly $50 million in free services since 2000.
- These programs, along with the free and discounted care that individual dentists provide every day, add up to an estimated $2.6 billion per year.

**Action for Dental Health**
ADH initiatives deliver care now to people already suffering with dental disease, strengthen and expand the public/private safety net, and bring dental health education and disease prevention into underserved communities.

- Reduce the number of people who visit the emergency room for a dental condition by referring them to dental practices, where they can receive proper dental care.¹ Emergency room visits for dental problems cost nearly $3 billion during the period from 2008 through 2010, according to a study in the Journal of the American Dental Association (April 2014, Vol. 145:4, pp. 331-337). The study noted that dental emergency room care costs more than regular care by oral health professionals. Also, most emergency room visits only provide patients with pain medication and don’t treat the underlying problem.
- Expand access to care for the vulnerable elderly in nursing homes.² Nursing home residents are often unable to travel and therefore it is important to provide care where they live.

¹ According to the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, the number of dental ER visits in the U.S. increased from 1.1 million in 2000 to 2.1 million in 2010. A separate study shows that in 2009, dental caries (the disease that causes cavities) and abscesses alone – almost entirely preventable conditions – accounted for nearly 80 percent of dental-related ER visits.

² Approximately 1.3 million nursing home residents face the greatest barriers to accessing dental care of any population group. Federal law requires nursing home facilities to provide dental care to residents, including routine and emergency care. But delivering dental care to these patients has been problematic. Now, dentists across the country are adopting nursing homes in their communities using the existing public health safety net. It’s an immediate and affordable solution for nursing home residents.
• Ensure more Americans have access to fluoridated drinking water. Fluoride in drinking water yields $38 in savings for $1 invested.

• Strengthen collaborations with other health professionals and organizations.

The American Dental Association urges you to cosponsor the “Action for Dental Health Act 2015” (H.R. 539).

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3 Endorsed by U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin, M.D. (P.D.F.) as “one of the most effective choices communities can make to prevent health problems while actually improving the oral health of their citizens,” community water fluoridation programs benefit everyone, especially those without access to regular dental care. For most cities, every $1 invested in water fluoridation yields $38 savings in dental treatment costs. That’s why the ADA and state dental associations are working with state and local governments to extend the proven health benefits of community water fluoridation to the greatest possible number of people.

4 Better collaboration among dental and medical professionals can be a means to ensure all Americans understand their dental health is a crucial part of their overall health. The dental health of a pregnant woman or a mother can affect the health of the baby. Maintaining good oral hygiene is one element to maintaining optimal overall health for people living with such conditions as diabetes or HIV. With minimal training, physicians, nurses, educators and others can dramatically increase the number of patients and caregivers who receive basic dental health education. These professionals also can be trained to recognize conditions needing diagnosis and possible treatment by a dentist.