A Progress Report
YEAR TWO: 2015
A Progress Report
TWO YEARS AGO, the American Dental Association launched Action for Dental Health, a nationwide, community-based movement to improve the oral health of America’s underserved populations.

Overall, oral health in the U.S. is among the best in the world. However, not everyone has experienced the same level of improvement over the past few decades. We recognize that underserved people face multiple barriers to optimal oral health, and there is no single solution to eliminating these barriers. That is why the ADA and its member dentists developed Action for Dental Health, a nationwide, community-based movement that provides care now to those already suffering from untreated dental disease, strengthens and expands the public and private safety net, and brings education and disease prevention into the nation’s most needy communities.

Action for Dental Health has taken root in every state in the nation, and continues to grow.

There are approximately 1.4 million senior citizens in nursing facilities in America, and we know that the number of people aged 65 and older is projected to double during the next 50 years. To improve the health of the vulnerable elderly, dentists in 13 states have implemented programs that provide care for seniors living in nursing homes or long-term care facilities.

Emergency rooms across the country are often flooded by patients seeking treatment for dental pain, and most hospitals are under-equipped and not sufficiently staffed to provide comprehensive dental care. Dentists have developed five different models of community partnerships that effectively connect people seeking care for severe dental pain in emergency rooms with the dentists who can best treat their conditions.

Every year, dentists throughout the country come together at Give Kids A Smile® community events to provide dental services to underserved children. Last year, approximately 350,000 children received dental care through 1,500 events in 49 states. Since the program started in 2003, nearly five million children have received treatment at these events.

Through Action for Dental Health, the American Dental Association is empowering communities to develop programs that fit their unique needs. This report highlights the progress ADA-member dentists have made during the movement’s second year. It is our hope that the momentum we’ve achieved this year will continue to grow in years to come, until all Americans can enjoy the good dental health they deserve.

Maxine Feinberg, D.D.S.
Dentists and community partners across the country created and implemented unique and sustainable solutions to deliver on these goals. These include:

**Emergency Room Referral:** Get people the right care in the right setting with referral programs from hospital emergency rooms to dentists

**Vulnerable Elderly:** Provide long-term care to nursing home residents who are disproportionately affected by lack of dental care

**Give Kids A Smile/Missions of Mercy:** Expand programs which provide screening and treatment, and help people in need connect with dentists for continuity of care

**FQHCs:** Create community-based contracting between local dentists and Federally Qualified Health Centers and other public and private clinics that provide care to the underserved

**Removing Barriers:** Increase dentists’ participation in Medicaid/Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) through reductions in administrative burdens and state-developed solutions that increase funding for dental services

**Collaborations:** Lead collaborations to achieve and exceed the Healthy People 2020 goals ([www.healthypeople.gov/2020](http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020))

**Fluoridation:** Expand community water fluoridation to help prevent tooth decay

**Community Dental Health Coordinators:** Help underserved people connect with community resources and dentists who can provide care

**Public education and outreach:** Raise awareness and empower healthier behaviors through collaborations and websites such as the Ad Council, Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives ([www.healthymouthshealthylives.org](http://www.healthymouthshealthylives.org)) and [MouthHealthy.org](http://www.mouthhealthy.org)
Dentists Are Making A Difference:
PROVIDE CARE NOW

People are suffering with untreated dental disease and they need care. It is more important now than ever before to understand how dental health is connected with overall health. Chronic diseases such as diabetes and obesity are reaching epic proportions. Early childhood caries (the disease that causes cavities) is the most chronic disease affecting U.S. children, and is five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever.

Health care reform has made some progress in improving access to dental care for children from low-income families, but there are still millions of adults and children who are not receiving the treatment they need. Veterans often face difficulties in accessing dental benefits, which are much more limited than medical benefits, through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). That’s why dentists in at least 12 states provide free care to those who have served in the military. For instance, the San Diego Dental Society is collaborating with University of California, San Diego pre-dental students and Veterans Village of San Diego, a full-service rehabilitation center for previously homeless veterans, to open a dental clinic this summer.

The American Dental Association (ADA) has mobilized the dental community and its partners across the country to help provide dental care to the people who need it most. Here are just a few of these stories ...
FROM THE EMERGENCY ROOM TO THE DENTAL CHAIR
Many people who lack dental coverage don’t seek help until the dental pain grows so severe that it sends them to the hospital emergency room. In 2009, abscesses and dental caries accounted for nearly 80 percent of dental-related emergency room visits, according to the Healthcare Cost and Utilization Project. The number of dental visits to hospital emergency rooms doubled from 1.1 million in 2000 to 2.1 million in 2010, according to the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey. The impact of these visits is significant; the ADA’s Health Policy Institute found that the cost of emergency room department charges related to dental issues in 2010 was $867 million to $2.1 billion. And up to 1.65 million dental visits can be diverted to dental clinics, which could potentially save the health care system $1.7 billion. Yet dental caries and abscesses are almost entirely preventable.

WEST VIRGINIA HEALTH DEPARTMENT CONNECTS LOW-INCOME ADULTS WITH DENTISTS
Smiles for Life, an emergency room referral program launched by the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department in Parkersburg, West Virginia, connects needy adults who don’t receive regular dental care with 22 dentists who provide basic services such as extractions and some restorative care. About 300 patients receive care every year through the program. The program is so successful that the local hospital has seen a 14 percent reduction in emergency room visits for dental pain.

MISSOURI DENTAL STUDENTS PROVIDE NEEDED CARE
Students at the University of Missouri–Kansas City (UMKC) dental clinic and local community health centers are helping to relieve the burden a local hospital, Truman Medical Center, faces in treating people with severe dental pain. The UMKC dental clinic has received about 30 referrals per month since the program started in February 2014. Dentists and dental students treat patients within 24 to 48 hours of their initial referral from the hospital, according to Dr. Michael McCunniff, chair of the school’s Department of Public Health and Behavioral Science. “You can’t turn patients away, so if they show up at the emergency room, you have to do something,” he said. “This program is an example of a successful model that provides people the right type of care in the right setting.”

DENTAL EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS, 2000–2010

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Visits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1.1 Million ER Visits</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2.1 Million ER Visits</td>
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From: National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey
PROVIDING DENTAL CARE TO THE VULNERABLE ELDERLY

According to 2013 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are approximately 1.4 million senior citizens in nursing facilities in America. And the elderly population of America continues to grow. In fact, the U.S. Census Bureau projects that America’s population of people aged 65 and older will double in the next 50 years.

Seniors – especially those in nursing homes or long-term care facilities – often have special dental needs and complicated medical conditions that require consideration and consultation with fellow medical professionals. Efforts are taking place across the U.S. to help this vulnerable population.

MARYLAND PROGRAM TRAINS DENTISTS TO WORK IN NURSING HOMES

The Maryland State Dental Association Foundation has developed a pilot program to train 15 teams of dentists, hygienists and dental assistants to provide care to nursing home residents through a $25,000 grant from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene’s Office of Oral Health. The pilot program incorporates the ADA’s “Dentistry in Long-term Care: Creating Pathways to Success,” an eight-module, self-paced online continuing education course. Dental teams participating in the pilot program also are required to work in nursing homes throughout the state and make case presentations about their experiences.

VERMONT NURSING HOME LAUNCHES DENTAL PILOT PROJECT

The Manor, a private, non-profit long-term care facility in Morrisville, Vermont, partnered with the Vermont Department of Health and Community Health Services of Lamoille Valley, a Federally Qualified Health Center, to provide comprehensive dental treatment for the nursing home’s residents through a pilot project launched in June 2014. The nursing home’s administration purchased portable dental equipment, and received a grant to pay for a device that sterilizes dental tools. The Manor also partnered with state and local dental agencies to help seniors with complex health problems receive dental treatment from the right providers.

WHEN THE AMERICAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION LAUNCHED ACTION FOR DENTAL HEALTH, IT PLEDGED THAT AT LEAST 10 STATE DENTAL ASSOCIATIONS WOULD BE COMMITTED TO IMPLEMENTING A LONG-TERM CARE PROGRAM TO IMPROVE THE ORAL HEALTH OF NURSING HOME RESIDENTS BY 2015.

THIS YEAR, DENTISTS IN 13 STATES HAVE SOME TYPE OF DENTAL ELDERCARE PROGRAM IN PLACE OR ARE IN THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTING ONE.
EXPANDING COMMUNITY SCREENING AND TREATMENT EFFORTS

One of the primary aims of Action for Dental Health is to provide care now to those who need it most.

GIVE KIDS A SMILE®

Give Kids A Smile began as a local dental clinic and education event for children who didn’t have access to dental care in St. Louis, Missouri. The ADA launched the Give Kids A Smile program nationally in 2003 as a way for dentists across the country to join with others in their community to provide dental services to underserved children. The program initially began as a one-day event in February, and has grown to local and national events year-round. An overarching goal of Give Kids A Smile is to connect children to area dentists who can provide continuity of care. At the events, dentists and other team members volunteer their time and services to provide screenings, treatments and education to children throughout the United States. Each year, approximately 350,000 children benefit from more than 1,500 events, all because of the efforts of 35,000 or more annual volunteers. Give Kids A Smile occurred in 49 states in 2015.

MISSIONS OF MERCY

The ADA also supports Missions of Mercy events to provide free dental care to the underserved. Texas was one of the earliest adopters of the Mission of Mercy program. Since 2001, Texas Mission of Mercy (TMOM) events have provided more than 29,000 patients with nearly $15 million worth of charitable care. Missions of Mercy events have served more than 177,000 people in 28 states across the country, providing nearly $107 million in free services. In 2011, dentists provided an estimated $1.7 billion in charitable care, according to the Health Policy Institute.
Increasing numbers of Americans are unable to pay for dental care, and many also lack the necessary resources to access care, even when it may be available to them. That is why the ADA is taking action to strengthen and expand the public/private safety net. This includes fighting for improvements to dental Medicaid, and helping more dentists work with community health centers and clinics.

**EXPANDING MEDICAID**

There have been great gains in children’s access to dental care under Medicaid, but adults still face extreme challenges.

A Health Policy Institute study using newly released data from 2012 shows that dental care use among children increased during the past decade, and at the time of the study was at its highest since the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) started tracking dental care use in 1996. From 2000 to 2010, dental visits among low-income children increased in 47 states.

Yet most state Medicaid dental programs fall short of providing the amount and extent of care needed by their low-income beneficiaries. In fact, the average state Medicaid budget allocates less than two percent for dental services. The Health Policy Institute estimates that as many as 8.3 million adults could become eligible to receive dental Medicaid coverage beyond emergency services through the implementation of the Affordable Care Act’s Medicaid expansion. An additional 2.5 million Americans are expected to gain Medicaid benefits that cover dental care only in emergency situations.
A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF STATES were successful in improving their adult dental Medicaid offerings in 2014. California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts and South Carolina were successful largely due to strong advocacy efforts.

**CALIFORNIA**

After eliminating most adult dental Medicaid benefits in 2009, California last year adopted a restored list of services, as well as some new preventive, restorative, endodontic and prosthetic services.

**COLORADO**

The state now provides a number of dental services, including restorative treatment, root canals, crowns, surgical procedures and full/partial dentures. Adult Medicaid enrollees are allowed as much as $1,000 in dental services per year.

**ILLINOIS**

Adult Medicaid coverage was restricted to emergency situations only in Illinois before 2014, when a newly established law simply stated that services would no longer be limited to emergencies. The array of services for adult Medicaid enrollees grew substantially based on that simple legislative provision, and what was once a very limited list of services has expanded to include a wide variety.
The ADA recognizes that prevention and education efforts are crucial to improving dental—and overall—health for people of all ages, and in reducing the need for more invasive and costly dental procedures down the line. One overarching goal of Action for Dental Health is to ensure people have access to a dentist and see that dentist regularly to prevent and treat disease.

The ADA is also working with health professionals, school officials, community groups and other organizations across the country to educate communities about proper dental care.

**COMMUNITY DENTAL HEALTH COORDINATORS IMPROVE DENTAL HEALTH AT THE LOCAL LEVEL**

Community Dental Health Coordinators (CDHC) play a vital role in improving access to dental care in underserved communities by providing dental health education, and by helping patients navigate the public health system to receive care from dentists. They help people overcome barriers to optimal oral health, help them find community-based resources, and dentists to provide needed care and teach them about good oral hygiene.

CDHCs work in inner cities, remote rural areas and Native American lands. Most grew up in these communities, allowing them to better understand the problems that affect access to dental care.
EXPANDING COMMUNITY WATER FLUORIDATION

This year marks the 70th anniversary of community water fluoridation, which the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has proclaimed one of 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century because of its role in reducing tooth decay. Studies show water fluoridation continues to be effective in reducing dental decay by at least 25 percent in children and adults even with widespread availability of fluoride from toothpaste and other sources.

The ADA strongly supports fluoridation at the national, state and local levels. Dentists join with other health professionals and community leaders to testify to elected officials and the public about the benefits of community water fluoridation. Today, nearly 3 out of 4 people on public water systems benefit from community water fluoridation.

The ADA and its state and local dental societies are working to extend the proven benefits of community water fluoridation to the greatest number of people. The ADA’s goal is that 80 percent of the U.S. population on public water systems will receive the cavity-prevention benefits of fluoridated water by 2020. Twenty states currently meet or exceed that goal.
ACTION FOR DENTAL HEALTH SUCCEEDS because of dentist-led, community-based efforts across the country. With your help, we can continue to improve the oral health of all Americans. We are asking elected officials, health policy organizations, community leaders and other interested stakeholders to join us in bridging the dental divide.

Please contact us at action@ada.org or 312.440.2500 to learn more.

Follow the progress of Action for Dental Health in your state at ADA.org/action.