

## Action for Dental Health: Dentists Making A Difference

### Many people face barriers to achieving good health.

- This year alone, more than 181 million Americans won't visit a dentist<sup>1</sup>, even though nearly half of people over 30 suffer from some form of gum disease and nearly one in four children under the age of five already has cavities<sup>2</sup>. Tooth decay is five times more common than asthma in children<sup>2</sup>.
- Nationally, more than 2.1 million people, the vast majority of them adults, showed up in emergency rooms with dental pain in 2010 — that's double the number from just a decade prior<sup>3</sup>. And the majority of dental emergency room visits, nearly 80 percent, were for preventable conditions such as abscesses and cavities<sup>3</sup>.
- Yet even in the face of such need, most state dental Medicaid programs are woefully underfunded. On average, state Medicaid budgets allocate only two percent or less to dental services<sup>4</sup>.

### Something has to change.

References  
1 ADA's Health Policy Resources Center analysis of 2010 MEPS and U.S. Census Data  
2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
3 National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey  
4 Medicaid Expense Report

### A year ago, the American Dental Association (ADA) started a nationwide, grassroots movement to help solve the dental health crisis in America.

Action for Dental Health: Dentists Making a Difference encourages the creation of enduring, self-sustaining solutions to remove barriers to good dental health and plays an important role in fulfilling the ADA's mission to advance the oral health of the public.

It is a community-based, three-pronged approach to provide care now to people who suffer from untreated dental disease, to strengthen and expand the public/private safety net and to bring disease prevention and education into communities.

### One year later, we are proud to report that Action for Dental Health has taken root in every state in our nation.

### Please Support the Action for Dental Health Act

While we are working to close the dental divide with Action for Dental Health, we cannot do it alone. We are asking elected officials, health policy organizations, community leaders and other interested stakeholders to join us in bridging the dental divide and to support the Action for Dental Health Act (H.R. 4395).

Introduced by Rep. Robin Kelly (D-Ill.), this bill will provide grants to help implement key initiatives of Action for Dental Health that will both reduce the barriers to care and address the dental health crisis in America. This includes grants to create emergency room referral programs, expand care for the elderly in nursing homes, encourage dentists to contract with Federally Qualified Health Centers, increase health protections and simplify administration under Medicaid, expand community water fluoridation, increase the number of Community Dental Health Coordinators and strengthen collaborations with other health professionals and organizations.

## Action for Dental Health encourages the creation of enduring, self-sustaining solutions to remove barriers to good dental health in the following three areas:



### PROVIDE CARE NOW TO PEOPLE WHO SUFFER FROM UNTREATED DENTAL DISEASE

Reforms at the state and national levels have made some progress in improving access to dental health for children from low-income families, but there are still millions of adults and children who don't have access to dental care. Action for Dental Health is bridging this gap through a number of programs including:

- **Emergency Room Referral:** Emergency room referral programs get people the right care in the right setting from hospital emergency rooms to dentists, and are a key initiative of Action for Dental Health.
- **Vulnerable Elderly:** Seniors — especially those in nursing homes or long-term care facilities — often have special dental needs and complicated medical histories that require consultation with fellow medical professionals. Efforts like in-nursing home care programs are already taking place across the U.S.
- **Give Kids A Smile®/Missions of Mercy:** One of the primary aims of Action for Dental Health is to provide care now to those who need it most by expanding charitable programs like GKAS and MOM.



### STRENGTHEN AND EXPAND THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE SAFETY NET

Action for Dental Health seeks to strengthen and expand the public/private safety net. This includes fighting for increased dental health protections under Medicaid and helping more dentists work with community health centers and clinics.

- **Federally Qualified Health Centers:** Action for Dental Health helps create partnerships between private practice dentists and community health centers to expand capacity to deliver care.
- **Removing Barriers:** Action for Dental Health aims to increase dentists' participation in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) through reductions in administrative burdens and state-developed solutions that increase funding for dental services.



### BRING DISEASE PREVENTION AND EDUCATION INTO COMMUNITIES

Nearly all dental disease is preventable. By bringing disease prevention and education into communities, people can gain a greater understanding of how to take care of their dental health and prevent future disease.

- **Community Dental Health Coordinators:** Similar to the community health worker model, CDHCs help people in underserved areas navigate the public health system to reach the dentist's chair. Created and funded by member dentists of the ADA, the program has graduated 34 CDHCs practicing in 8 states.
- **Collaborations:** ADA is dedicating resources to collaborations, public/private partnerships and community-based interventions to achieve and exceed the [HealthyPeople.gov](https://www.healthypeople.gov) 2020 oral health goals.
- **Fluoridation:** Studies prove water fluoridation continues to be effective in reducing dental decay by at least 25 percent in children and adults. ADA supports the expansion of community water fluoridation.
- **Public Education and Outreach:** The ADA is involved in initiatives to empower people to take care of their dental health, including promoting dental health literacy through websites such as [MouthHealthy.org](https://www.mouthhealthy.org).

We hope that you will join us in our efforts to help ensure that all Americans have access to good dental health.

For a detailed list of Action for Dental Health Goals, and Action for Dental Health initiatives on a state-by-state basis, please visit [ADA.org/action](https://www.ada.org/action).