



ADA American Dental Association®

## Healthy teeth and gums aren't a luxury. **THEY'RE ESSENTIAL.**

That's because our dental health has an impact on our overall health and neglecting one can negatively impact the other. That's why the American Dental Association (ADA) is launching Action for Dental Health: Dentists Making a Difference, a nationwide campaign aimed at boldly addressing the dental health crisis facing America today.

### **ALL AMERICANS DESERVE GOOD DENTAL HEALTH**

The causes of the dental health crisis are varied and complex. But we know that for each of us – and for the nation as a whole – it's never too late to get on top of our dental health.

Action for Dental Health aims to prevent dental disease before it starts and reduce the proportion of adults and children with untreated dental disease through [oral health education, disease prevention and providing treatment now to people in need of care](#). Our goal is to help all Americans attain their best oral health.

Action for Dental Health is comprehensive in its approach and scope and is designed to address the dental health crisis in three distinct areas.

### **KEY INITIATIVES**

#### **I. PROVIDING CARE NOW TO PEOPLE SUFFERING WITH UNTREATED DISEASE**

- > **Reducing the number of people who visit the emergency room for dental conditions, by referring them to community health centers or private dental practices, where they can receive proper dental care.** People suffering from dental pain need somewhere to turn for help. Frequently the place they turn is the emergency room of their local hospital. 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. While emergency rooms can provide pain relief and treat infection, few hospitals have dentists on staff so they aren't able to provide comprehensive dental care. Moving patients with dental pain out of the ER and into the dental chair ensures that they get the right care at the right place.
- > **Expanding access to care for the elderly in nursing homes.** 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

### **AMERICA IS IN A DENTAL HEALTH CRISIS**

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#### **181 MILLION**

The number of Americans who didn't visit the dentist in 2010, according to the ADA's Health Policy Resources Center analysis of 2010 MEPS and U.S. Census Data.

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#### **NEARLY ½ OVER AGE 30**

Population of adults suffering from some form of gum disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

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#### **NEARLY 1 IN 4**

Children under the age of five who already have cavities, according to the CDC.

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.

- > **Increasing programs where dentists can directly provide care to those who are suffering from lack of dental care today.** 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, aggregate into an estimated \$2.6 billion per year.

## II. STRENGTHENING AND EXPANDING THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE SAFETY NET TO PROVIDE MORE CARE TO MORE AMERICANS

- > **Helping provide more care to people by having private-practice dentists contract with Federally Qualified Health Centers.** By partnering or contracting with community health centers, private dentists are able to help these safety net facilities expand their capacity to provide care to underserved populations (primarily children on Medicaid), without increasing the clinics' "bricks and mortar" expenses and staffing overhead. Patients benefit because quality care can be quickly and efficiently delivered, alleviating much of the backlog experienced by many health center dental programs. Access to dental specialty services can also be increased. Contracting with the health centers allows private dentists to work with underserved populations without having to contend with many of the administrative headaches of the Medicaid program.
- > **Fighting for increased dental health protections and simplified administration under Medicaid.** This proven solution has dramatically improved access to care in some states. A combination of fee increases and administrative reforms in Connecticut's Medicaid program in 2008 increased the number of participating dentists from fewer than 200 to more than 1,200. As a result, nearly 70 percent of enrolled children had at least one dental visit per year, a rate higher than that for privately insured children and dramatically higher than the 15 percent who saw a dentist prior to the state's Medicaid reforms. But most Medicaid programs remain inadequate for children, while comprehensive coverage for adults is all but nonexistent in most states. Expanding Medicaid coverage and improving the system means more dentists providing more care to more people in need.

## III. BRINGING DENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION AND DISEASE PREVENTION INTO COMMUNITIES

- > **Ensuring more Americans have access to drinking water with fluoride.** Endorsed by U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin, MD 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.
- > **Increasing the number of Community Dental Health Coordinators (CDHCs).** CDHCs are community health workers with dental skills focusing on education and prevention. They forge strong

# Action for DENTALHEALTH➔

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relationships with people in underserved communities with disproportionately high rates of dental disease. CDHCs teach people about the importance of good dental hygiene, provide preventive services such as dental sealants and connect people with dentists who will provide comprehensive treatment. And, since CDHCs are often members of the communities they are serving, they are more apt to understand the unique challenges facing the people they are helping.

- > **Strengthening collaborations with other health professionals and organizations.** 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. As part of its ongoing work to foster these collaborations, the ADA will convene a diverse group of oral health stakeholders at a Prevention Summit in November.

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To learn more about ADA's Action for Dental Health, visit [ADA.org/action](https://www.ada.org/action).

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