July 23, 2012

Honorable Kathleen Sebelius  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building  
200 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC  20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

Our organizations respectfully ask you to commission an update to the Surgeon General's 1988 Report on Nutrition and Health and the 2000 Report on Oral Health in America, particularly the sections that detail current knowledge about the relationships between specific dietary practices and oral diseases. We also ask for a summary of the implications of this information for individual food choices, public health policy initiatives and further research.

Dentists and other oral health professionals are concerned about the record numbers of sugar-sweetened beverages (a.k.a. “soft drinks” and/or “soda pop”) being consumed by America’s youth. Preliminary data suggest that frequent consumption of these beverages can lead to enamel erosion and tooth decay. The data are limited, however, and the gaps leave many questions about the extent to which these beverages singularly cause or contribute to tooth decay.

We strongly urge you to commission a report that, at a minimum, evaluates scientific literature on the extent to which sugar-sweetened beverage consumption affects oral health. We also ask that you put forward a science-based definition of “soft drinks” and/or “soda pop”. The definition should account for the natural sugar(s), added sugar(s), carbonation and acid(s) in these beverages. It should also distinguish “soft drinks” from beverages many consider healthy despite their sugar and acid content (e.g., fruit juices, milk, etc.).

From a dental perspective, a steady diet of sugary foods and drinks, including juice and sports drinks, can damage teeth. A Report from the Surgeon General will shine a light on this issue and, hopefully, generate fact-based policies around which the oral health community can coalesce.

We appreciate your consideration of our request. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Robert J. Burns at the American Dental Association. Bob can be reached at 202-789-5176 or burnsr@ada.org.

Sincerely,

American Dental Association  
Academy of General Dentistry  
American Academy of Periodontology  
American Association for Dental Research  
American Association of Dental Consultants  
American Association of Endodontists  
American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons  
American Association of Public Health Dentistry
American Association of Women Dentists
American College of Prosthodontists
American Dental Education Association
American Dental Hygienists’ Association
American Society of Dentist Anesthesiologists
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
Hispanic Dental Association
National Dental Association

cc:  Dr. Howard Koh, Assistant Secretary for Health
     Dr. Regina Benjamin, Surgeon General of the United States

References