

Good Oral Health is Essential to Overall Health

Oral health is more than a beautiful smile

Physical and emotional well-being is linked to our oral health. Oral health involves the ability of individuals to carry out essential functions such as eating, speaking and contributing fully in society. In 2000, the United States Surgeon General's Report asserted, "...you are not healthy without good oral health."

Dental caries and periodontal disease are the two major dental diseases that affect all segments of society. The consequences of untreated dental disease include pain, costly dental treatments, emergency room visits, absence from work or school and systemic health complications. Yet, dental disease is preventable.

The Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health (PCOH) advocates for everyone's oral health, particularly those who are unable to access basic dental care and preventive oral health education and services across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

A CALL TO ACTION

There are many alarming stories that highlight the serious consequences of the lack of access to oral healthcare. The most publicized tragedy was the death of Deamonte Driver, a 12-year Maryland resident, who died from an infected tooth.

PCOH urges Pennsylvania's decision makers to fund oral healthcare as a priority to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the Commonwealth.

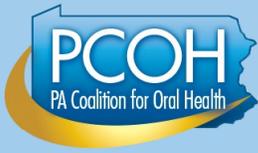
- 1. Actively promote evidence-based preventive services and research*
- 2. Promote and fund strategies that will increase the oral health workforce capacity and effectiveness*
- 3. Fund oral health infrastructure in the Pennsylvania Department of Health*

For more information,
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PCOH has identified the following issues and recommendations

Issue #1: Poor Oral Health Hurts Everyone

In 2009, over 900,000 emergency department visits and nearly 13,000 hospital inpatient stays were related to dental problems nationally. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Currently, there is no standard method of data collection regarding emergency room dental related visits in Pennsylvania.

1 in 4 elderly Americans have little or no remaining teeth, making it extremely difficult to maintain a healthy and balanced diet. ⁽³⁾ Currently, Medicare does not cover the elderly.

More than 40% of low income individuals have at least one untreated infected or decayed tooth. ⁽⁵⁾

Dental caries (cavities) are the most common chronic infectious disease of childhood. ⁽²⁾

Over 40% of children have dental caries by the time they reach kindergarten. ⁽¹⁾

Students missed more than 51 million hours of school due to dental disease or dental visits. ⁽⁷⁾

In Pennsylvania, less than 25% of high-need schools have dental sealant programs. Dental sealants are a proven prevention strategy against tooth decay. ⁽¹²⁾

As of 2012, 54.6 % of citizens of Pennsylvania receive fluoridated water; Pennsylvania ranks #40 in water fluoridation among all other states. ⁽⁴⁾

Recommendation

Support evidence-based oral health preventive programs and research at the state and local levels:

- **Expand data collection for dental related emergency room visits through the Pennsylvania Health Care Cost Containment Council**
- **Fund a study to evaluate access to oral health care for the elderly in Pennsylvania**
- **Increase the number of school sealant programs throughout Pennsylvania**
- **Recommend that all children have a dental home by age one**
- **Fund oral health preventive education for parents and children**
- **Promote community water fluoridation**

Issue #2: Lack of Access to Oral Healthcare

The shortage and uneven distribution of dental providers in Pennsylvania that care for patients with Medical Assistance, especially in rural areas, must be solved.

27 percent of Pennsylvania residents live in rural areas with a shortage of dental providers. ⁽⁸⁾

55 counties in Pennsylvania face a shortage of dental professionals. ⁽⁷⁾ More dentists are retiring than entering the profession in the rural areas of the state. ⁽⁷⁾

In Pennsylvania, there are only 37.7 dentists for every 100,000 Pennsylvanians compared to the national average of 64 dentists for every 100,000 people. ⁽⁸⁾

Pennsylvania dentists that participate with Medical Assistance only average 10.9 dentists per 100,000 people in the population. ⁽⁷⁾

Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioners provide preventive care in public health settings without the supervision of a dentist. The lack of reimbursement by the Department of Human Services and insurers limits their ability to provide access to care in public health settings. ⁽¹³⁾

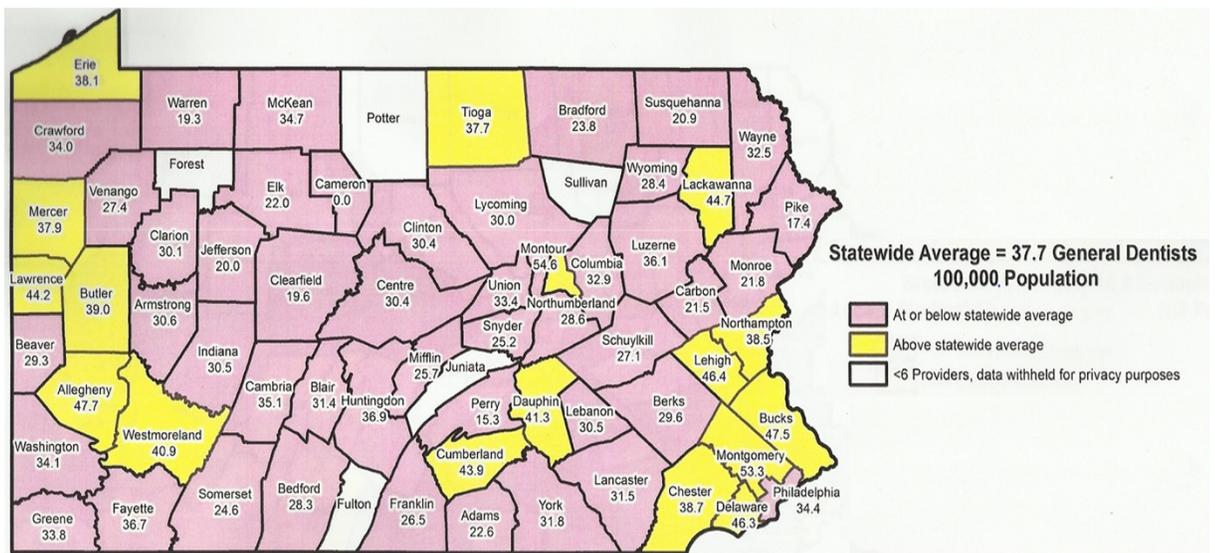
Currently, Medical Assistance offers basic coverage for adults but not comprehensive coverage. Reimbursement rates for dental providers are low and the enrollment and credentialing process is cumbersome and long. Consequently, fewer dental providers participate with Medical Assistance.

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Source: 2011 Pulse of Pennsylvania Dentists and Dental Hygienist Workforce. Bureau of Health Planning, Department of Health.

Recommendation

Adopt strategies to increase the oral health workforce:

- **Increase Medical Assistance dental reimbursement rates**
- **Streamline enrollment and credentialing processes to entice more dentists to participate in Medical Assistance**
- **Provide reimbursement opportunities for Public Health Dental Hygiene Practitioners working in public health settings**

Issue #3: The Oral Healthcare System

It is essential that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania strengthen its oral healthcare infrastructure and capacity to improve its dental public health programs

In 2002, the Pennsylvania Department of Health partnered with dental providers, public health professionals and advocates to assess the oral health needs in Pennsylvania and develop a comprehensive oral health plan. The oral health plan was not implemented largely due to lack of funding.

There is insufficient reliable and comprehensive descriptive data for current oral healthcare planning.

A state-based surveillance system for ongoing monitoring, timely communication of findings and the use of data to initiate and evaluate oral health programs does not exist in Pennsylvania.

Recommendation

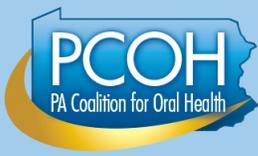
Improve the state's oral health care infrastructure

- **Update, revise and fund the Pennsylvania Oral Health Plan**
- **Collect descriptive data to support the Pennsylvania Oral Health Plan**
- **Develop and fund a robust surveillance system to include statewide oral health statistics that will inform oral health policy and programming within the Pennsylvania Department of Health**

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The Steering Committee members endorse the recommendations outlined in this publication

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Supporters and Members of the Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health
are listed on the organization's website

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