

Communities Support Improved Access to Oral Health

Dear Esteemed Washington State Legislators and Governor Inslee,

We are coming together from across Washington State to call on you to improve access to oral health care for all our people.

In our communities, too many people are suffering because they do not have access to the routine and preventive oral health care they need to stay healthy overall. For too many of our most vulnerable neighbors, affordable dental care is one of their greatest unmet needs¹, and we witness the impacts every day.

When kids have untreated cavities, they spend their time in school dealing with their pain, not paying attention to the teacher. When adults have toothaches and infections, they miss work. For adults who have lost teeth to decay, it can be nearly impossible to find a decent job. Seniors often suffer silently, while oral health problems worsen and make them sick. People living with disabilities can face enormous barriers to accessing care. In many of our communities, our hospital emergency rooms are left to provide expensive, stop-gap care that treats the symptoms, but not the cause of the problem. Children, adults, and seniors are suffering – and it doesn't have to be this way. Washington is an innovative and compassionate place. We can and should do better.

It's good news that more than 700,000 people are newly eligible for dental coverage on January 1st 2014. Thank you for including adult dental coverage in the expansion of Medicaid coverage. As we move forward, it is important that newly covered Washingtonians can find the dental health care they need.

The Washington State Board of Health recently made comprehensive recommendations² for improving the oral health of Washingtonians. The recommendations include strategies for improving prevention, education, and access to care. They include, among others, increasing sealant programs, improving oral health literacy, and promoting efforts to ensure a workforce exists to address access to care needs.

The recommendations hold a great deal of promise. We are asking you to use your leadership to put the Washington State Board of Health recommendations into action to improve the oral health and well-being of ALL Washingtonians.

Sincerely,

¹ Washington State Hospital Emergency Room Use Report: <http://www.wsha.org/files/127/ERreport.pdf>;
Veteran's Resource Committee Strategic Plan: <http://www.co.clark.wa.us/veterans/Documents/2012VRCStrategicPlanFinal.pdf>;
Snohomish County Low-income Needs Assessment: http://www.co.snohomish.wa.us/documents/Departments/Human_Services/Community/2010_Snohomish_County_Low-Income_Needs_Assessment_Report-Final.pdf

² Recommended Strategies for Improving the Oral Health of Washington Residents: <http://sboh.wa.gov/OurWork/CurrentProjects/OralHealthStrategies.aspx>

AARP of Washington
Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians
Alliance for a Just Society
American Friends Service Committee
American Indian Health Commission of Washington
Asian Pacific Americans for Civic Empowerment (APACE)
Cedar River Group
Center for MultiCultural Health
Childcare Resources
Children's Alliance
Community Health Network of Washington
Community Health Plan of Washington
Eastern Washington Voters
Elder Care Alliance
Faith Action Network (formerly Lutheran Public Policy Office)
Forever Smiles DHS
Health Coalition for Children and Youth (HCCY)
Healthy King County Coalition
Latinos for Community Transformation
League of Women Voters WA
LGBTQ Allyship
Mary Bridge Children's Hospital
National Association of Social Workers—Washington
Neighborhood House
New Beginnings

Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board

Nutrition First

Olympia Coalition for a Fair Budget

OneAmerica

Para Los Niños

Parent Trust

Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action

RealChange

Resident Councils of Washington

School Nurse Organization of Washington

School's Out Washington

Sea Mar Community Health Centers

Seattle NAACP

SEIU Healthcare 775NW

SEIU 1199NW

Senior Services

SOAR

Solid Ground

Statewide Poverty Action Network

Tooth Savers of Washington

Triumph Treatment Services

Washington Adult Day Services Association

Washington Association of Community and Migrant Health Centers

Washington Association for Infant Mental Health

Washington Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians (WA-ACEP)

Washington Community Action Network (Washington CAN!)

Washington Dental Service Foundation

Washington Low Income Housing Alliance

Washington Rural Health Association

Washington State Community Action Partnership

Washington State Dental Hygienists' Association

Washington State Family Childcare Association

Washington State Hospital Association

Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO

Washington State Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Washington State Oral Health Coalition

Washington State Senior Citizen's Lobby

Whatcom Alliance for Health Advancement

Willamette Dental Group