

---

## **Connecticut Must Protect and Promote Access to Oral Health**

Large numbers of our residents lack access to basic oral health care, especially those who are poor. This leads to pain and embarrassment as well as many severe and expensive problems, even though most dental disease is completely preventable. We must make sure that all Connecticut residents have access to quality oral health care. Doing so will be fair, will save money, and will help prevent other serious health issues.

### **2009 Legislative Recommendations**

#### **COHI Supports Legislation that Ensures:**

- **Inclusion of oral health care in any plan for expanded or universal health care**
- **Continued Medicaid coverage for dental services to adults**
- **All pregnant women have access to oral health care including periodontal services (shown to significantly reduce the incidence of pre-term births)**
- **Continued support for school-based health centers and the inclusion of oral health education and services in them**
- **Every child over the age of one has a dental home and receives regular and needed preventive dental visits and treatment**
- **A required oral examination by a dental professional as part of mandated health examinations for children including those under EPSDT, child day care physical exams and school entrance.**

## Why is Oral Health So Important?

### **Children, and poor children in particular, face increased and often severe risks due to poor access to oral health care**

- Oral health problems are responsible for more missed school days than any other type of health problem. Three out of 100 children miss school because of dental pain.
- The lack of dental care in children can lead to extensive dental disease, hospitalization for acute infections, increased risk of disease in permanent teeth, extensive pain and poor nutrition.
- More than twice as many children lack dental insurance as lack medical insurance.
- Tooth decay is the single most common chronic disease among children: it is five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever in children.
- Thousands of Connecticut's children have dental problems severe enough to wake up with a toothache - or fail to fall asleep because of one.
- Eighty percent of dental disease is found in only one quarter of the children. Low-income children are much more likely to suffer this disease but are also much less likely to obtain dental care. Children in poverty suffer from twice as much tooth decay as their more affluent peers.
- Three times more of America's children are in need of dental services than medical services, yet those with public insurance are one-quarter as likely to see a dentist as they are to see a physician.
- Every child should have a dental home no later than age one. Few do.

### **Regular dental visits can prevent severe and expensive health problems that result from lack of preventive care and early detection. Oral Health cannot be separated from overall health. We all pay when access is restricted.**

- Preventive dental care is relatively inexpensive. A three-year aggregate comparison of Medicaid reimbursement showed that it costs 10 times more to treat dental emergencies in hospital (\$6,498) than to provide preventive care in a dental office (\$660).
- A recent study of pregnant women with serious gum disease published in the Journal of Periodontology found that early treatment with scaling/root planing reduced pre-term births by 84%.
- Studies show that poor oral health is a strong predictor of heart disease. It is also closely associated with diabetes, nutrition problems, pneumonia in older adults, and other serious health conditions.
- Low-income children who see a dentist by age one are less likely to have subsequent restorative care or emergency room visits and their average dental costs are almost 40% lower (\$263 vs. \$447) over a 5-year period than children who receive their first preventive visit after age one.
- Disabled and low-income older adults are particularly at risk for oral health problems.