

08-06

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### Oral Health

#### Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports oral health for all Americans. To this end, NACCHO encourages the following:

- Collaboration among communities, policymakers, and healthcare providers to promote oral health as an important part of an individual's general health and well-being;<sup>1</sup>
- The promotion of effective prevention strategies to improve and maintain oral health, particularly the following:
  - Promoting daily oral hygiene;
  - Water fluoridation;<sup>2</sup>
  - Dental sealants;<sup>3</sup>
  - Smoking prevention and cessation programs;<sup>3</sup>
  - Smokeless tobacco cessation programs; and
  - Topical fluoride;<sup>4</sup>
- The integration of oral health education and promotion into existing public health programs;
- Universal oral health insurance coverage for the uninsured and underinsured;
- Increased access to oral health services, particularly in underserved communities;
- Increased Medicaid reimbursement for oral health service providers; and
- Increased state and federal support for innovative oral healthcare delivery models and the exchange of these models among oral health service providers.

#### Justification

Oral health is an integral and essential component of overall health. The United States has seen improvements in oral health due to prevention measures adopted by communities, individuals, and oral health professionals; however, all Americans have not experienced the same degree of improvements.<sup>5</sup> Some of the inequities that contribute to the disparities in oral health include disparate access community water fluoridation, the lack of oral health insurance and poor access to services.

Equal access to sufficient levels of community water fluoridation must be ensured. Currently, community water fluoridation—the adjustment of water fluoride that occurs naturally in water to protect oral health—reaches 66 percent of Americans (211 million people) on public water supplies; however, over 100 million Americans do not receive fluoridated water.<sup>6, 7</sup> The fluoridation of water (including bottled water) at levels for optimal dental health (0.7 to 1.2 ppm) is a proper means of protecting and furthering the public's health.<sup>8</sup>



Furthermore, oral health insurance and access to oral health services must be improved for children and adults. The United States Public Health Service (USPHS) notes that more than 108 million Americans do not have dental insurance.<sup>9</sup> Among those affected are about 7 million low-income children who do not have adequate access to dental sealants. Dental sealants prevent various forms of cavities in children and eliminate the need for invasive treatments. If applied, dental sealants could save up to \$300 million in dental treatment costs.<sup>10</sup> The lack of insurance limits access to health services and results in the increased dental-related illness among the un- and underinsured, among which children are significantly impacted.<sup>9</sup>

Oral health has also been linked to other health and social outcomes. Pregnant women with poor oral health are more likely to experience poor birth outcomes such as preterm birth, development of preeclampsia, and the delivery of small-for-gestational-age babies.<sup>11</sup> In addition, children with poor oral health are more likely to suffer poor academic performance and poor self-esteem.<sup>11</sup>

Due to the relationship between oral health and general health, oral health should be a right for all individuals. Public policies that support population-based prevention measures and access to comprehensive dental health services are essential in promoting and maintaining the public's health and the oral health of the nation.

## **References**

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## **Record of Action**

*Approved by NACCHO Board of Directors November 2008*

*Updated January 2017*