

The importance of prevention in the form of oral health literacy is often overlooked, much to the detriment of our nation's oral health needs.

Oral disease left untreated can result in pain, disfigurement, loss of school and work days, nutrition problems, expensive emergency room use for preventable dental conditions, and even death.

The good news is that the vast majority of oral health ailments can be avoided by increasing oral health literacy and awareness, with a special emphasis on children to ensure they develop and maintain healthy habits into adulthood.

In Jan. 2017, HHS released a midterm report detailing the status of its Healthy People 2020 initiative. Launched in 2010, HP2020 set new 10-year goals and objectives for health promotion and disease prevention. The report shows that progress toward achieving the HP2020 targets has generally been positive.

Unfortunately, the indicator tracking "the number of persons who visited a dentist in the past year," shows that progress is getting worse in meeting this objective.

The HP2020 baseline for this objective is 44.5% (2007), with a target of 49%. According to the report's most recent data in 2012, the percentage has dropped to 42.1%. **This means fewer individuals are visiting the dentist than did in 2007.**

It is clear that oral health and oral health literacy are not receiving the attention they deserve and that more needs to be done at all levels to educate the public about the importance of maintaining good oral health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The AGD urges you to sponsor legislation to amend the *Public Health Service Act* as follows:

Direct the Secretary, acting through the Director of the CDC and the Administrator of HRSA to:

1. Establish a 5-year national, public education campaign that is focused on oral healthcare prevention and education, including prevention of oral disease such as early childhood and other caries, periodontal disease, and oral cancer.
2. Award demonstration grants to eligible entities to demonstrate the effectiveness of evidence-based oral health literacy activities. The Secretary shall utilize information generated from grantees under this section in planning and implementing the public education campaign.

Oral Health: By the Numbers

Tooth decay is the most common chronic illness among school-age youth, impacting roughly 1 in 4 children.

In 2012, almost 1 in 5 Americans 65 and older had untreated cavities and over 40% had gum disease.

Illnesses related to oral health result in 6.1 million days of bed disability, 12.7 million days of restricted activity, and 20.5 million lost workdays each year.

By focusing on prevention, thousands of lost school days and millions of dollars can be saved.

Dental Care Utilization by age and insurance status, 2005 to 2013		
Medicaid-enrolled	2005	2013
Children	35.3%	48.3%
Adults*	N/A	24%
Privately insured	2005	2013
Children	59.8%	64%
Adults	60.2%	59.2%

*Medicaid-enrolled adults residing in states that provide adult Medicaid dental benefits. Only 2013 numbers available.

Source: Vujcic M, Nasseh, K. Gap in dental care utilization between Medicaid and privately insured children narrows, remains large for adults. Health Policy Institute Research Brief. American Dental Association. December 2015 (Revised).

Available from: http://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Science%20and%20Research/HPI/Files/HPIBrief_0915_1.ashx.

Healthy People 2020 January 2017 Midterm Report					
Children, adolescents, and adults who visited the dentist in the past year (2012)					
2020 Baseline (year): 44.5 (2007) / Healthy People 2020 Target (49.0)					
Populations	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total	42.9	43.1	42.1	41.8	42.1
American Indian or Alaska Native only	32.1	33.7	32.3	36.6	36.5
Asian only	42.7	42.1	38.9	37.0	38.2
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander only	40.4	33.7	35.0	24.1	30.3
Black or African American only	29.8	30.6	31.6	30.0	30.2
Hispanic or Latino	28.2	27.8	28.7	29.7	29.8
White only	45.0	45.2	43.9	43.9	44.2
Geographic Location (2007 Baseline – 44.5 / 2020 Target – 49.0)	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total	42.9	43.1	42.1	41.8	42.1
Metropolitan	44.3	44.1	43.2	42.9	43.1
Non-Metropolitan	37.9	39.8	38.3	37.4	38.1

Source: <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/data/Chart/5028?category=3&by=Race/Ethnicity&fips=-1>