

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Delta Dental Celebrates Near-Universal Dental Coverage for Children

*10 Years after the Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health in America,
new legislation offers reasons to smile*

OAK BROOK, Ill (June 1, 2010) – The potential result of two new pieces of legislation – near universal oral health care for the nation's children – offers Americans good reason to smile during National Smile Month this June.

According to Chris Pyle, director of public relations for the Delta Dental Plans Association, the combination of the passage of the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA) in 2009 and the more recent Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act have the potential to bring oral health coverage to nearly all of the nation's children.

The policy changes come a decade after the Surgeon General's *Report on Oral Health in America* first sounded the alarm about a silent epidemic of dental and oral diseases in America. Even now, millions of children continue to suffer with unmet dental needs. "Dental cavities are five times more common than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever," notes Pyle. "Despite increased dental insurance coverage, increased access to fluoridated water and advances in prevention methods, tooth decay remains the most common chronic disease affecting children."

Now, CHIPRA mandates comprehensive dental coverage for children in separate state Children's Health Insurance Programs (CHIP) and allows states to use CHIP funds to provide dental coverage to CHIP-eligible children who have medical coverage but lack sufficient dental coverage.

CHIPRA also allows federally qualified community health centers (FQHC) to contract with private practice dentists to provide oral health services.

“This is significant, since there are 49 million Americans living in more than 4,000 designated Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas where many safety-net clinics operate,” says Pyle. “CHIPRA also provides for education to new parents on important oral health practices during a child’s early years. Both dental and medical professionals recommend that a child go to the dentist by age one or within six months after the first tooth erupts, but most American children don’t see their family dentist until they are well over two years old.”

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and its corresponding reconciliation bill will fill remaining coverage holes and greatly expand oral health treatment and education initiatives.

Health care reform legislation defines pediatric dental services as an essential benefit, meaning that once health insurance exchanges are up and running in the year 2014, small group and individual insurance plans offered through the exchanges – and new small group and individual plans offered outside the exchanges – must include pediatric dental coverage. The combination of this new coverage mandate, existing Medicaid, CHIP and CHIPRA programs and those who are already privately insured will mean near universal access to dental coverage for children.

The legislation provides funding to study and demonstrate the effectiveness of research-based dental caries (tooth decay) disease management. Findings from these studies could lead to widespread adoption of proven practices that will prevent unnecessary pain, suffering and other complications resulting from tooth decay.

“These and other reforms present a real opportunity to advance oral health in America to a level that may not have seemed possible a decade ago,” Pyle says. “Today, 10 years after the Surgeon General’s seminal report, millions of children are being spared the fate of insurance concerns that prevent them from making an appearance at the dentist’s office. And, that should give us all a reason to smile.”

The Delta Dental Plans Association (www.deltadental.com) based in Oak Brook, Ill., represents a network of independent dental service corporations specializing in providing dental benefits programs to 54 million Americans in more than 93,000 employee groups throughout the country.

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