

# Vermont Action for Dental Health

Vermont State Dental Society

## Healthy teeth and gums aren't a luxury. THEY'RE ESSENTIAL.

That's because our oral health has an impact on our overall health, and neglecting one can negatively impact the other. Vermont dentists are committed to boldly addressing the dental health crisis facing Vermont today.

## VERMONTERS DESERVE GOOD ORAL HEALTH

Vermont Action for Dental Health aims to prevent dental disease before it starts and reduce the proportion of adults and children with untreated dental disease through oral health education, disease prevention and providing treatment now to people in need of care. Our goal is to help all Vermonters attain their best oral health.

Vermont Action for Dental Health is comprehensive in its approach and scope and is designed to address oral health in three distinct areas.

## KEY INITIATIVES

### I. PROVIDING CARE NOW TO PEOPLE SUFFERING WITH UNTREATED DISEASE

#### Increasing programs where dentists can directly provide care to those who are suffering from lack of dental care **■** today.

- **Vermont's Tooth Tutor Program** - This program helps ensure that every child has access to preventive, restorative and continuous care in a dental office. Schools choose to participate in the Tooth Tutor Program. A dental professional will help the school nurse update dental information in each child's school health file, assisting families who currently do not have a dentist to find a dental home for their children and provide a free dental screening to these children upon request.
- **Expanding access to care for the elderly in nursing homes** - Approximately 80% of Vermont nursing home residents face the greatest barriers to accessing dental care of any population group.\*\* Federal law requires nursing home facilities to provide dental care to residents, including routine and emergency care. But delivering dental care to these patients has been problematic. The Vermont State Dental Society (VSDDS) is working with dentists to adopt nursing homes in their communities using the existing public health safety net. It's an immediate and affordable solution for nursing home residents.

**Reducing the number of people who visit the emergency room for dental conditions, by referring them to community health centers or private dental practices; where they can receive proper dental care.** **■** People suffering from dental pain need somewhere to turn for help. Frequently, the place they turn is the emergency room of their local hospital. While emergency rooms can provide pain relief and treat infection, most hospitals don't have dentists on staff making them unable to provide comprehensive dental care. Moving patients with dental pain out of the ER and into the dental chair ensures that they get the right care at the right place.

## ORAL HEALTH IN VERMONT

### HEALTHY STATE

Vermont ranked second healthiest state in the country\*. 80% of Vermont dentists accept Medicaid.

### NEARLY 3 IN 4

children under the age of five are cavity free, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), but we can do better.

### NEARLY HALF OVER AGE 30

Population of adults suffering from some form of gum disease, according to the CDC.

\*America's Health Report, December 2013

\*\*Source: American Health Care Association, "LTC Stats: Nursing Facility Operational Characteristics Report," Sept. 2013 Update, pg. 6

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## II. REINFORCING THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE SAFETY NET TO PROVIDE MORE CARE TO MORE VERMONTERS

- **Helping provide more care to people by having private-practice dentists contract with Federally Qualified Health Centers.** By partnering or contracting with community health centers, private dentists are able to help these safety net facilities expand their capacity to provide care to underserved populations (primarily children on Medicaid) without increasing the clinics' "bricks and mortar" expenses and staffing overhead. Access to specialty services can also be increased. Contracting with the health centers allows private dentists and specialists to work with underserved populations without having to contend with many of the administrative headaches of the Medicaid program.

## III. BRINGING DENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION AND DISEASE PREVENTION INTO COMMUNITIES

- **Establishing Community Dental Health Coordinators (CDHCs).** CDHCs are community health workers with dental skills focusing on education and prevention. They forge strong relationships with people in underserved communities with disproportionately high rates of dental disease. CDHCs teach people about the importance of good dental hygiene, provide preventive services such as dental sealants, connect people with a dental home where they can get comprehensive treatment, and work to make sure people show up for their scheduled appointments. And, since CDHCs are often members of the communities they serve, they understand the unique challenges facing the people they are helping. The VSDS received a grant to bring a CDHC Fellow to work in Vermont during the fall of 2013.
- **Strengthening collaborations with other health professionals and organizations.** Better collaboration among dental and medical professionals ensures that all Vermonters understand their dental health is a crucial part of their overall health. Maintaining good oral hygiene is one element to maintaining optimal overall health for people living with such conditions as diabetes or HIV. With minimal training, physicians, nurses, educators and others can dramatically increase the number of patients and caregivers who receive basic dental health education. These professionals also can be trained to recognize conditions needing diagnosis and possible treatment by a dentist.
- **Increasing dental capacity.** There is a state and national concern that baby-boom dentists will retire in such numbers as to reduce what some consider to be an already inadequate dentist population. The ADA and the American Dental Education Association have conducted studies that cite many factors potentially affecting retirement patterns. Studies indicate that the number of dental school graduates will steadily increase through 2030. Vermont has an Expanded Function Dental Assistant (EFDA) — or midlevel professional certification program. There are more than 40 EFDAs currently in Vermont who could be better utilized to expand capacity.
- **Commitment to recruitment.** The residency program at UVM/Fletcher Allen Hospital is our most effective recruitment tool. Most of the dentists who come to Vermont for a residency stay in Vermont. VSDS' recruitment program, which is funded by the Vermont Department of Health, aims to bring more trained dentists to practice throughout the state. The University of New England's College of Dentistry opened its doors in the fall of 2013, and has four Vermonters already enrolled. Vermont has maintained a level workforce over the past ten years, but we need to ramp-up our efforts. We not only need to attract and recruit new dentists in the face of increased retirements, but we need to deal with the misdistribution of dentists in our state. More dental and specialty services are needed in our most rural areas.
- **Expand the use of fluoride.** Continue to partner with the Vermont State Health Department in their effort to expand the use of public water fluoridation, which is critical to oral health prevention. Every \$1 spent on water fluoridation saves \$38 in dental treatment.