

November 8th, 2013

Washington State Board of Health
P.O. Box 47990
Olympia, WA 98504-7990

Dear Members of the Washington State Board of Health,

As Health Officer for Clallam and Jefferson Counties I am writing to applaud the State Board of Health for including oral health as part of its responsibility to serve the public's overall health. I support your approval of *Recommended Strategies to Improve the Oral Health of Washington Residents* (Recommendations) as addressed in Item 13 of the November 13th, 2013 Washington State Board of Health (SBOH) agenda.

There is a growing awareness among public health professionals that oral health status is a critical determinate of overall community health status and is strongly linked to heart disease, diabetes, cancer risk, and adverse birth outcomes. Ensuring access to Oral health can be particularly challenging for rural counties like Clallam and Jefferson that have a shortage of dentists to serve its population and where access to Medicaid-sponsored care for adults is extremely limited.

Oral health continues to be a pressing issue for our region. In Clallam and Jefferson Counties 4,218 Medicaid-eligible children under age six and in 2012 the Medicaid dental utilization was just under 30 percent in Clallam County and 36 percent in Jefferson County, compared to the state average of 51 percent. A recent Community Health Summit hosted by the Clallam County Department of Health and Human Services and the Olympic Medical Center identified six key community health priorities. Expanded access to oral health ranked high among those priorities.

We have found that community members working in partnership with public and private entities can make a significant difference in improving access to oral health in our region. In August, the Volunteers in Medicine of the Olympics sponsored the first ever Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD) training for Clallam and Jefferson counties. SeaMar Community Health Center plans to open up a new dental clinic in Port Angeles in the first quarter of 2014. The Port Angeles City Council, with support from a broad-based community coalition, voted to approve fluoridation of its water system which had benefited over 20,000 residents for the last 8 years. All of these successes fall within the proposed Recommendations now being considered by the SBOH.

Of particular importance to our community are the following aspects of the recommendations:

- Continued access to programs such as ABCD and Adult Medicaid that serve to improve access to care and preventive oral health services
- Community water fluoridation which prevents cavities in everyone regardless of their income level or background by on average 25%

- Expanding the number of providers willing to serve in rural communities through loan repayment or the RIDE program
- Continued and improved surveillance of the burden of dental disease on our population

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on a very important policy initiative by the SBOH. I'm very pleased that you have chosen to consider these strategies to improve oral health in Washington State.

Sincerely,

Thomas Locke, MD, MPH
Health Officer
Clallam and Jefferson Counties