



## **Recommended Strategies to Improve the Oral Health of Washington Residents**

### **Goals:**

- To promote strategies which are consistent with *Healthy People 2020* in order to improve the oral health of Washington residents
- To reduce oral health disparities among Washington residents
- To guide Washington State Board of Health (SBOH) rule and policy development activity
- To provide leadership on public health policies that focus on oral health promotion, prevention, early intervention, and treatment

The following strategic recommendations are based on a review of established evidence and best practice models, consultation with expert informants, input from Washington state and National expert oral health review panels. The recommendations are not intended to be a comprehensive list of available strategies, but should be considered by communities, organizations, and agencies seeking to promote oral health in the State of Washington. Special consideration was given to oral health strategies that are evidence based, cost effective, and impact high risk populations. These seven important strategies taken together will significantly improve the oral health of Washington residents.

### **State Board of Health Strategic Recommendations**

**Health Systems:** Support policies and programs that improve oral health for Washington state residents.

- Maintain and build on effective programs, like Access to Baby and Child Dentistry, University of Washington Regional Initiatives in Dental Education (RIDE), and adult Medicaid coverage
- Examine cost-effective measures to strengthen Washington's dental public health infrastructure
- Explore cost containment measures to reduce inefficient oral health costs – for example decrease unnecessary emergency room use for dental issues
- Evaluate incentives for healthcare providers who provide services to low income adults and special populations, including diabetics and pregnant women
- Support dedicated staffing to lead a statewide oral health coalition and measure the impact of oral health programs

**Community Water Fluoridation:** Expand and maintain access to community water fluoridation for the health benefit of children, adults, and seniors.

- Support communities that currently provide optimal levels of fluoride to their residents and those seeking to adopt community water fluoridation.
- Support efforts to educate and inform Washington state residents about the importance of fluoridation to improve community health.

- Engage with organizations, agencies and coalitions to promote community water fluoridation in Washington state

**Sealant Programs:** Provide school-age children with access to dental sealants to prevent cavities.

- Promote school based sealant programs aligned with the Centers for Disease Control's expert work group recommendations for school-based sealant programs

**Interprofessional Collaboration:** Incorporate oral health improvement strategies across healthcare professions (such as medicine, nursing, social work, and pharmacy) and systems to improve oral health knowledge and patient care.

- Encourage the State of Washington's healthcare systems and providers to incorporate oral health into their practices
- Encourage health focused educational institutions to incorporate and maintain oral health in their curricula
- Explore innovative collaborative approaches to improve interprofessional delivery of oral health services - for example explore oral health models used by other states
- Support strategies that focus on high risk groups like pregnant women, children, seniors, and those with exacerbating chronic conditions like diabetes or HIV/AIDS

**Oral Health Literacy:** Improve the capacity of people to obtain, understand, and use health information in order to increase their acceptance and adoption of effective oral health focused preventive practices.

- Encourage collaboration to provide consistent and culturally relevant oral health messaging in settings with at-risk populations: perinatal, senior centers, and early learning (such as Head Start, child care, and home visiting programs; and Women, Infants, and Children Food and Nutrition Services)
- Collaborate with diverse organizations to promote oral health - for example, engage with the Office of Drinking Water, community based anti-obesity efforts, and private enterprise in order to promote healthy behaviors like drinking water, healthy eating habits, reducing tobacco use, and preventing mouth injuries

**Surveillance:** Monitor trends in oral health indicators to ensure policies and programs are advancing the oral health of Washington residents, including those most at risk for poor oral health outcomes.

- Maintain the Washington State Smile Survey to monitor the oral health of preschool, kindergarten, and elementary school-age children; and the Washington State Oral Disease Burden Document to monitor the oral health of all residents
- Implement oral health surveillance systems for vulnerable populations, including patients enrolled in Medicaid or State Children's Health Insurance Program, homeless, and elders.
- Utilize surveillance tools, including BRFSS, PRAMS, and Cancer Registry among others, to design and track measurable goals and objectives toward improving oral health among Washington residents

**Work Force:** Develop health professional policies and programs which better serve the dental needs of underserved populations.

- Develop programs to mentor, recruit and train students of color in the dental professions.
- Investigate options to serve rural and underserved communities - for example expanding the University of Washington Dental RIDE program and increasing the number of community health centers
- Research the best ways to recruit and develop a workforce to provide care for the dental underserved regions in our state - for example partnerships with academic institutions, and new strategies to recruit and retain dental professionals
- Support policies for the exploration and feasibility of new and emerging evidence based dental workforce models to increase access to and efficiency of dental treatment.