

OPEN LETTER TO THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

OCTOBER 20, 2009



DEAR MR. PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF CONGRESS,

The mouth is the gateway to many vital functions of a healthy body. We urge you to rightly prioritize dental disease and oral health conditions equally alongside other serious medical conditions as you seek solutions to improve the nation's health.

The failure of our nation to recognize the fatal and costly consequences that result from uneven access to dental care has already led to the deaths of two children. In 2007, Deamonte Driver (age 12) of Maryland and Alexander Callendar (age 6) of Mississippi died because bacteria from a tooth infection spread when their dental disease remained untreated. Dental disease was also responsible for the death of Diane Stamps of Utah, an adult Medicaid patient who died when a tooth infection led to meningitis in her spinal fluid and traveled to her brain.

In the case of Deamonte Driver, he spent six weeks under hospital care after his tooth infection spread to his brain. Treating his tooth infection earlier with an \$80–\$100 tooth extraction could have saved his life. Earlier dental treatment would also have saved the State of Maryland \$250,000 for the cost of his intensive, in-patient hospital care.

People without dental insurance often forego or delay routine dental care until their condition deteriorates and emergency treatment is needed. Unlike many medical conditions that run their course without professional intervention, dental conditions rarely heal on their own. Left untreated, dental disease usually worsens over time. At advanced stages, dental disease is much more costly and difficult to treat.

Still, basic dental care remains beyond the reach of 130 million Americans who have no dental insurance coverage. For every American that lacks health insurance, there are two more without dental insurance. In 2005, when two Harvard researchers interviewed people without health care coverage, "the most common complaint they heard was about teeth."

Dental disease, if diagnosed and treated promptly, is almost entirely preventable. As Congress works to improve our health care system, sensible strategies that include simple preventive interventions and low-cost treatments to ensure good dental and oral health are essential for the total health of our citizens.

By adopting policies to prevent and treat dental disease before it can cause significant health consequences, Congress can save lives, reduce societal costs, and end needless pain and suffering.

RESPECTFULLY,

6th District Dental Hygienist Association, Endicott, NY
Allegany Health Right, Cumberland, MD
Allied Dental Education, Santa Rose, CA
Alternative Dental Hygiene of California, Inc., Bakersfield, CA
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association for Dental Research
American Association of Public Health Dentistry
American Dental Education Association
American Mobile Dental, Mamaroneck, NY
Anderson Center for Dental Care, San Diego, CA
Anderson Valley Health Center, Inc., Boonville, CA
Aroostook County Action Program, Inc., Presque Isle, ME

Asian Festival Corporation, Columbus, OH
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
Baker Victory Dental Center, Lackawanna, NY
Blue Cross & Blue Shield of North Carolina
Butler County Board of Development Disabilities, OH
California Alliance for Retired Americans
California Association of Dental Plans
California Dental Hygienists' Association
Child Health & Disability Prevention Program, San Francisco, CA
Children NOW, Oakland, CA
Children's Dental Health Project
Children's Dental Services, Minneapolis, MN

Claremont Dental Initiative, Claremont, NH
Clinica Sierra Vista, Bakersfield and Fresno, CA
Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County, CA
Community Health Alliance of Pasadena, CA
Community Health Center of Snohomish County, Lynnwood, WA
Consortium for Urban Indian Health, San Francisco, CA
Council of Community Clinics, San Diego, CA
Crochted Mountain Rehabilitation Center, Greenfield, NH
Dental Action Committee, MD
Dental Aid, Inc., Louisville, CO
Dental Health Foundation, CA
Dental Health Improvement Committee, Manitowoc, WI
Dental Hygienists' Association of the State of New York, Inc.
Dental Trade Alliance
Eastman Institute for Oral Health at the University of Rochester, NY
Eisner Pediatric & Family Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA
El Paso Oral Health Coalition, El Paso, TX
Endowment for Health, Manchester, NH
Family Health Center of Boone County, Columbia, MO
Geriatric Education Center of Michigan, Grand Rapids, MI
Healthy Smiles for Kids of Orange County, CA
Hill County Health and Wellness Center, Round Mountain, CA
Hispanic Dental Association
Horizon Health Center, Inc, Howard, SD
Howard University College of Dentistry, Washington, DC
I'SOT Inc. DBA Canby Family Practice Clinic, Canby, CA
Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition, Chicago, IL
Indiana University School of Dentistry, Indianapolis, IN
Institute for Oral Health, Seattle, WA
JCL Consulting, San Diego, CA
Jefferson County Department of Health, Birmingham, AL
Kansas Area Agencies on Aging Association
Kansas Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Keys Lobbying and Consulting, LLC, Fredericksburg, VA
Kids Community Dental Clinic of Burbank, CA
Lake County Office of Education, Lakeport, CA
Los Angeles Christian Health Centers, CA
Lower Columbia College Head Start, Longview, WA
Maine Dental Access Coalition
Medicaid Matters! Maryland
Mission Neighborhood Health Center, San Francisco, CA
Missouri Coalition for Oral Health
Mother & Child Health Coalition, Kansas City, MO
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Children's Oral Health Foundation
National Consumers League
National Dental Association
Neighborhood Healthcare, Escondido, CA
Neighborhood Involvement Program Community Clinic, Minneapolis, MN
NEK-CAP, Inc., Hiawatha, KS
New Orleans Health Department-Dental Services, LA
NH Oral Health Coalition
Normandale Community College, Bloomington, MN
North Coast Clinics Network, Eureka, CA
North Country Children's Clinic, Watertown, NY
North East Medical Services, San Francisco, CA

Northwoods Dental Project, Hazlehurst, WI
Nova Southeastern University College of Dental Medicine, FL
Oak Orchard Community Health Center, Brockport, NY
Oral Health America
Oral Health Kansas
Oral Health Network of Missouri
Oral Health Services, Evendale, OH
Organization for Safety and Asepsis Procedures
PDI Surgery Center, Windsor, CA
Phoenix College Department of Dental Programs, Phoenix, AZ
Portland Financial Planning Group, Portland, ME
Potter Valley Community Health Center, Potter Valley, CA
Progressive Family & Cosmetic Dentistry, Eldersburg, MD
Public Justice Center, Baltimore, MD
REACH Healthcare Foundation, Merriam, KS
Red Lake Comprehensive Health Services, Red Lake, MN
Rural Health Network of Monroe County, Key West, FL
Sabre Springs Dentistry, San Diego, CA
Salud Para La Gente, Watsonville, CA
San Francisco Community Clinic Consortium, CA
San Jose Clinic, San Jose, CA
Santa Barbara Neighborhood Clinics, Santa Barbara, CA
Santa Clara Valley Dental Hygiene Association, Cupertino, CA
School of Dentistry, University of Minnesota, MN
Self Management Services, Newton, KS
Seven Valleys Health Coalition, Inc., Cortland, NY
Shingletown Medical Center, Shingletown, CA
Smiles Change Lives, Kansas City, MO
Southern New Hampshire Area Health Education Center, Raymond, NH
Southwestern Area Health Education Center, Trumbull, CT
St. Luke's Hospital and Health Network, Bethlehem, PA
St Mary's Innovis Health, Detroit Lakes, MN
Summit County Health District, Stow, OH
Swope Health Services, Kansas City, MO
Temple University Korbeg School of Dentistry, Philadelphia, PA
Texas A&M Health Science Center Baylor College of Dentistry, Dallas, TX
The Arc of Greater Cleveland, Cleveland, OH
The Saban Free Clinic, Los Angeles, CA
Tulare Community Health Clinic, Tulare, CA
UNIDAD of Miami Beach, FL
United Methodist Health Ministry Fund, KS
University of Buffalo School of Dental Medicine, NY
University of California at Los Angeles School of Dentistry, CA
University of California, San Francisco, CA
University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine
University of Florida College of Dentistry
University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry
University of Louisville School of Dentistry, KY
University of Michigan School of Dentistry
University of Minnesota, MN
University of Nebraska Medical College
University of the Pacific, Arthur A Dugoni School of Dentistry, San Francisco, CA
University of Washington School of Dentistry
Wentworth Douglas Hospital, Dover, NH
West County Health Centers, Inc., Guerneville, CA
Western University of Health Services, Pomona, CA