

# The Affordable Care Act and Its Impact on Oral Health

“All Americans should have access to quality, affordable health care.”



## Oral Health in Massachusetts: A Fact Sheet

### What is the Affordable Care Act (ACA)?



In March 2010, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was passed and signed into law. The Affordable Care Act is a healthcare law that strives to improve our current healthcare system.<sup>1</sup> It puts in place a comprehensive health insurance reform, increases access to health coverage, introduces new protections for people with health insurance, lowers overall healthcare costs, guarantees choice, and improves healthcare quality for all Americans.<sup>2</sup>

### How does the ACA impact healthcare?

The Affordable Care Act shifts our health care system from one that focuses on treating the sick to one that focuses on keeping people healthy. The law will increase access to affordable health care for individuals, families, seniors and businesses.<sup>3</sup> It will prevent insurance companies from denying coverage and imposing coverage limits, offer alternatives to the private insurance market through options such as the Affordable Insurance Exchanges, and provide tax credits to small businesses to make health care more affordable.<sup>3</sup>

### How does the ACA affect Oral Health?

The Affordable Care Act improves the oral health status of Americans. The law will encourage oral health prevention and promotion, increase access to dental care, and improve the quality of dental services.



The ACA also includes a 5-year demonstration program to train and employ alternative dental health care providers. Alternative dental health care providers include dental hygienists, primary care physicians, dental therapists, and dental health aides. This program could increase access to affordable dental services when implemented.<sup>1</sup>

The government will increase funding for dental education and training, establish new dental residency programs, and expand the dental workforce training program to include dental students and practicing dentists. Incentives for oral health professionals working in high-need areas will be increased, and a National Health Care Workforce Commission will be established to ensure dental health care quality and efficacy especially in high-need areas.<sup>4</sup>

Under the ACA, about \$11 billion will be used to fund community health centers, increasing access to affordable dental services.<sup>4</sup> Oral health research, surveillance, and data collection will also be improved, and accessibility standards of dental diagnostic equipment for people with disabilities will be established.<sup>4</sup>

### The Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives Ad Campaign

More than 35 groups in the dental community have come together to form the *Partnership for Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives* dental coalition and have partnered with The Ad Council to produce a public service ad campaign as part of the ACA and its inclusion of a 5-year evidence-based public education campaign. Aimed to begin in the summer of 2012, the campaign will provide education and raise awareness about the importance of children's oral health.<sup>5</sup>



## Dental Care for Children

The Affordable Care Act has initiated efforts to improve the oral health status of children in the United States. Starting in 2014, the law will require that all insurance plans provided by the Affordable Insurance Exchanges include dental services for children under 21. Stand-alone dental plans will be allowed to participate in the Exchanges, providing consumers with the option of buying pediatric dental coverage directly from these dental plans or through medical plans. For new insurance plans beginning on or after September 23, 2010, oral health risk assessments for children must be covered without having to pay a copayment or co-insurance, or without having to meet a deductible.<sup>1</sup>



Through the ACA, the federal government will provide grants to school-based health centers, including those providing oral health services. In addition, all states, territories, and Indian tribes will receive funds to implement school-based dental sealant programs.<sup>4</sup>

## Dental Care for Adults

Although the Affordable Care Act considers dental care essential for children, it does not address basic dental benefits for adults. The law allows states to increase their Medicaid income eligibility to a minimum of 133% of the Federal Poverty Level; however, adult dental coverage will remain optional under Medicaid and will be determined on a state-by-state basis. Adult dental coverage will not be included as part of the essential benefits package offered through the Affordable Insurance Exchanges.<sup>6</sup>

## References

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