



**Washington Dental Service
Foundation**

Community Advocates for Oral Health

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National report cites access to oral health care as a critical problem

Washington making progress, but more work remains

SEATTLE – Too many Americans lack access to oral health care, which can have serious consequences for overall health, finds a new national report from the **Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council**. Dr. Frederick Rivara, MD of the University of Washington School of Medicine was chair of the committee that wrote the report.

The report emphasizes that oral health is critical to overall wellness. Severe dental disease and lack of access to routine dental care can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease, and diabetes. The report recommends the integration of oral health care into overall health care by engaging non-dental health care professionals, calls for improved dental education and training and urges states to maximize access through policy and advocacy.

“Washington is already advancing a number of the strategies recommended by the Institute of Medicine, including engaging primary care providers in oral health and preventing dental disease and expanding access to early care for very young children,” said Russell Maier, MD, Chair of Washington Dental Service Foundation’s Board of Trustees.

The Access to Baby and Children Dentistry (ABCD) program connects Medicaid-enrolled children up to age 6 to dental care in 34 of 39 counties. This program involves training practicing dentists (and dental students) to deliver care to young children, enhanced reimbursement, and community-based outreach and support for families. As a result, more than twice as many Medicaid-enrolled children received dental care in 2009 as compared to 1997 when ABCD was just starting.

(more)

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Washington has also made strides educating non-dental professionals. Since 2002, nearly one in three primary care providers have been trained by Washington Dental Service (WDS) Foundation to address children's oral health: detect early signs of dental disease, provide education for families, deliver preventive services (fluoride varnish application), and make referrals when needed. WDS Foundation also has partnered with Group Health and other large healthcare systems to integrate the delivery of preventive oral health services during well-child checks.

"Washington is making progress, but more needs to be done," said Maier. "Too many low-income children and adults in our state still suffer from preventable dental disease."

In January of this year, Washington eliminated dental coverage for Medicaid-insured adults. While coverage will be reinstated this fall for some vulnerable populations — pregnant women, those in nursing homes, and people with developmental disabilities — many adults and seniors in Washington will still not have access coverage and dental care.

For a summary of the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine report, [go here](#).

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About the Washington Dental Service Foundation

Washington Dental Service (WDS) Foundation, a non-profit funded by Washington Dental Service, the leading dental benefits company in Washington state, is dedicated to significant, long-lasting improvements in the oral health and overall health of Washington's young children and seniors. WDS Foundation works to prevent oral diseases such as tooth decay and gum disease with a focus on children and seniors. For more information, visit: deltadentalwa.com/foundation

About the Institute of Medicine

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) is an independent, nonprofit organization that works outside of government to provide unbiased and authoritative advice to decision makers and the public. Established in 1970, the IOM is the health arm of the National Academy of Sciences, which was chartered under President Abraham Lincoln in 1863. Nearly 150 years later, the National Academy of Sciences has expanded into what is collectively known as the [National Academies](#), which comprises the [National Academy of Sciences](#), the [National Academy of Engineering](#), the [National Research Council](#), and the IOM.