



# ALASKA PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Committed To Advancing Alaska's Public Health Since 1978

## ALPHA RESOLUTION 5-2008

### Support for Enhanced Dental Services for Adult Medicaid Recipients

Sponsor: Alaska Dental Access Coalition  
Brad Whistler, DMD

---

**WHEREAS**, recognizing that decayed or missing teeth can be a significant factor in employability and/or job advancement, welfare recipients who received rehabilitative dental treatment (including fillings, extractions, and dentures) were "...twice as likely to receive favorable or neutral employment outcomes as they were to receive unfavorable employment outcomes."<sup>1</sup>

**WHEREAS**, acknowledging that improvement in dental care access helps those most in need, the American Dental Association recommends adult preventive and restorative dental services be included in all state Medicaid programs. Tribal health programs and community health centers share this service expansion initiative and stand ready to implement increased dental care to those most in need.

**WHEREAS**, knowing that studies show links between oral health and other systemic/chronic disease including diabetes and cardiovascular disease,<sup>2</sup> enhanced dental services may lead to reduced Medicaid expenses for clients with chronic diseases.

**WHEREAS**, understanding that maternal periodontal disease is linked with pre-term, low birth-weight (PTLBW) births, good oral health in pregnant women may result in a reduction in health care expenses for children with poor birth outcomes. One recent study indicated women with periodontal disease are 7.5 times more likely to have a PTLBW baby.<sup>3</sup>

**WHEREAS**, setting an annual maximum limit on non-emergent Medicaid dental services, such as the existing \$1,150 annual limit per adult Medicaid recipient, controls Medicaid expenditures - it also encourages the dentist and client to discuss priorities and treatment options. The

---

<sup>1</sup> "Dental Treatment Highly Effective in Helping Welfare Recipients Gain Employment", University of California – San Francisco School of Dentistry, press release, March 10, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Okero, CA et al., "Tooth Loss and Heart Disease: Findings from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System" *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 2005; 29:5 (supplement 1)

<sup>3</sup> Lief S, Hared H, McKaig R et al., "Periodontitis and Preterm Low Birth Weight in Pregnant Women" *Journal of Dental Research*, 2000;79(supplemental):608

current amount of the annual limit allows for adult Medicaid recipients to receive a complete set of dentures over a two-year period.

**WHEREAS**, recognizing that studies show increased risks of early childhood caries in infants with mothers/caregivers who have active dental decay due to transmission of bacteria,<sup>4</sup> Alaskan children will experience better dental health and less dental infection and less dental infection if parents/caregivers can have their treatment needs met prior to the infant's teeth erupting..

**WHEREAS**, acknowledging that much of the focus on dental decay is on children, adults remain at high risk for two common health problems: dental decay and periodontal disease.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Alaska Public Health Association supports and will advocate for continued coverage of non-emergent dental services (e.g., preventive and routine restorative dental services), specifically the legislative reauthorization of the services in the 2009 legislative session, for adult Medicaid recipients. .

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Alaska Public Health Association as an organization as well as individual Board Members and other Members will engage in low and no-cost advocacy efforts to promote coverage expansion such as, but not limited to, the following:

- Circulation of advocacy action requests to membership
- Circulation of advocacy action requests to partners and other individuals
- Posting of ALPHA resolutions on the Alaska Public Health Association's website and/or making this resolution available
- Participation in email advocacy campaigns
- Contact with policy makers via phone, letter, email and/or in-person meetings
- Public testimony in legislative hearings, town hall meetings, and other public forums
- Contribution of op-ed articles and/or letters to the editor
- Contributions to radio programs via calling-in or scheduled interviews
- Distribution of this resolution statement to policy makers and key officials such as the Governor's office and, at a minimum, members of Senate and House HESS and Finance Committees.

---

### **Fiscal & Public Health Impact Statement**

**Fiscal Impact on ALPHA:** This action will result in minor costs associated with sending this resolution and accompanying cover letter to the Governor and key political leaders.

**Public Health Impact:** The enhanced dental services for adult Medicaid recipients makes available preventive and restorative dental services, in addition to the existing dental emergency services, for the 41, 000 adults enrolled in the Medicaid program.

---

<sup>4</sup> Li Y et al., "Characterization of Maternal Mutans Streptococci Transmission in an African American Population." *Dental Clinics of North America* 2003; 47(1):87-101.