

Conclusion

This report is the first document to provide an overview of oral health in Washington State in a comprehensive manner. The information contained here shows that:

- Historically, Washington State has been a pioneer in several fronts, such as in the development of the Smile Survey, the Tooth Tutor curriculum, the State Oral Health Coalition and the “Community Roots for Oral Health Coalition” guide. All of these initiatives have been adopted by other states in some form. More recently, Washington State has developed its own oral disease surveillance system and its cleft lip and palate recording and referral system.
- Washington State has met the Healthy People 2010 objectives for untreated caries (more specifically for white children), tooth loss in younger and older adults, preventive dental visits for children, and use of dental services by children. Additionally, Washington has oral health programs in all of its 35 LHJs, 32 of which count on their own local oral health coalitions. The upcoming Bright Futures Oral Health Project will bring together all local oral health programs and MCH-related programs in an effort to develop basic, consistent and evidence-based oral health materials tailored to all our public health partners.
- However, Washington still rates low in terms of water fluoridation, school-based or linked sealant programs, and incidence and mortality for oral and pharyngeal cancers. Health disparities and dental workforce issues need to be addressed, especially in rural areas and for Medicaid patients. More awareness is needed for medical and dental providers about the importance of good oral health for pregnant women and children.
- To the extent possible, data collection needs to be expanded to address all HP2010 Oral Health Objectives. Examples are: caries status (of individuals with special health care needs, adolescents, adults, pregnant women, and seniors), periodontal (gum) diseases, oral cancer screening and tobacco cessation interventions by dental professionals, diversity of the dental workforce, use of dental services by long-term care residents, and dental insurance coverage. More information on the evaluation of existing dental public health programs is also needed.

Many opportunities lay ahead. The 2003 Surgeon General’s *National Call to Action to Promote Oral Health* recommended five main actions and implementation strategies to help the country accomplish its HP2010 oral health objectives: change public perceptions of oral health; overcome barriers by replicating effective programs and proven efforts; build the science base and accelerating science transfer; increase oral health workforce diversity, capacity, and flexibility; and increase collaborations.

Multiple oral health strategies have the potential to improve the oral health conditions for the whole population and for groups at high risk. Although several efforts have been made in our state, much work remains to be done. This burden document represents an important step toward raising awareness for Washington’s oral health problems and seeking collaborative solutions. The recommended next step is to begin a policy discussion that involves coalitions and organizations at state and local levels. These steps will lead to the creation of an environment that is better educated and conducive to the development of a collaborative state oral health plan with defined strategies and sound implementation and evaluation components. A state plan would provide strategic guidance to government, health professionals, educational institutions, businesses, and communities to improve the oral health and, thereby, the overall health of Washingtonians.

The Impact of Oral Disease on the Lives of Washingtonians will help statewide efforts to promote oral health programs and policy. We are confident that this document will inform many individuals and organizations and make oral health a priority in their agendas.

We would like to hear your feedback. Please let us know whether this document has been useful to you and your organization and if you have any suggestions or data for its next edition. An online survey will be available in the near future at http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Oral_Health/burden.htm.