



SBOH #15-004

For immediate release: April 30, 2015

Contact: [Kelie Kahler](#), State Board of Health, 360-236-4102

Spokane Hosts Washington State Symposium on Oral Health

Washington State Board of Health recommendations embraced by community leaders

OLYMPIA – Oral health is a key component of overall health, and in recognition of that, more than 60 community leaders attended *Oral Health for Washington* symposium today, April 30, in Spokane to discuss collaboration across health sectors to further improve the well-being of Washington residents.

The symposium, sponsored by the Washington State Board of Health, Empire Health Foundation, and Washington Dental Service Foundation, presented the board’s [seven Recommended Strategies to Improve Oral Health for Washington Residents](#) that includes health systems, inter-professional collaboration, oral health literacy, surveillance, work force, sealant programs, and community water fluoridation programs.

Symposium participants discussed how to implement those strategies and build on Spokane’s history of oral health innovation—Spokane County is home to the first Access to Baby and Child Dentistry program (ABCD), which connects young, low-income children to dentists, and has been replicated in all counties across that state.

“Spokane has provided much innovation over the years in key roles in developing creative programs to improve access to dental care for individuals and families,” said James Sledge, a Spokane area dentist and member of the State Board of Health. “I’m excited the symposium is in my hometown where programs such as Access to Baby and Child Dentistry have made great strides in providing access to dental care for people here at home and throughout the state.”

(continued)

Oral diseases are costly, painful, and widespread in Washington. Dental disease is the most common chronic disease of childhood. For example, less than half of the children in Spokane are cavity-free by third grade and nearly 40% of kindergartners across Washington have had tooth decay.

“Preventing oral disease and improving oral health is important. Early treatment is vital because dental problems often start small,” said Keith Grellner, Chair of the State Board of Health. “Poor oral health and gum disease are linked to chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease as well as stroke and pneumonia. Chronic disease is the leading cause of death, disability, and healthcare costs in the U.S. By improving oral health we can reduce the occurrence of chronic disease, improve health outcomes, and reduce healthcare costs.”

The Spokane event was the second *Oral Health for Washington* symposium. The other was held in Tukwila on April 21, 2015.

###

The board’s mission is to provide statewide leadership in advancing policies that protect and improve the public’s health. It does this by reviewing and monitoring the health status of all people in Washington; analyzing policies, providing guidance, and developing rules; promoting system partnerships; and encouraging public engagement in the public health system. For more information, visit the [Board of Health website](http://sboh.wa.gov/) (sboh.wa.gov/).