

# Executive Summary

The U.S. Surgeon General characterizes good oral health as a prerequisite for people's general health and quality of life. Yet many barriers prevent some Americans from having optimal oral health. Oral health affects people both physically and psychologically. It influences how they grow, enjoy life, look, speak, chew, taste food, and socialize. Poor oral health brings negative effects to children and adults in all settings— home, school, work, and social activities.

Oral diseases, such as dental caries and periodontal disease, are important public health issues because they are common and have high socioeconomic costs. Fortunately, most oral diseases can be prevented with simple and effective measures.

This report, *The Impact of Oral Disease on the Lives of Washingtonians*, is a new, comprehensive document that provides an overview of the oral disease burden in Washington State. It also describes the state's dental workforce, the preventive measures available to promote the oral health of all who live here, as well as existing resources for dental care and its financing. The main section presents statewide data, while the appendices have more information at the county level, especially for those counties that completed their own oral health needs assessments (Smile Survey) in 2005.

The information in this report comes from a variety of sources. Oral disease data come from the newly established Washington State Oral Disease Surveillance System, which contains the results of national and state surveys.<sup>1</sup> Information on workforce and resources for care and financing are the generous contribution of several public and private oral health partners. The Department of Health plans to update this document as new data become available.

This document can be used to:<sup>2</sup>

- Raise awareness among the public, health professionals, and policy makers about the importance of oral health to general health and quality of life.
- Understand the effect and cost of oral diseases on individuals and communities.
- Track the trends of oral diseases and related disparities among Washingtonians.
- Measure Washington State's progress toward national public health objectives.
- Learn about workforce issues and resources available, such as preventive and treatment programs and services at the state and county levels.
- Highlight existing community initiatives.
- Identify and pursue partnerships within existing oral health resources and other public health areas such as tobacco prevention and nutrition.
- Provide information to decision-makers on the successes, challenges, gaps, and opportunities related to oral health in our state.
- Aid in the planning of efficient and effective oral health promotion and disease prevention programs.

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<sup>1</sup> A public health surveillance system "is the ongoing, systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of health-related data essential to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of public health practice, closely integrated with the timely dissemination of these data to those responsible for prevention and control."

<sup>2</sup> Source: D'Angelo D, Colley Gilbert B, editors. *From Data to Action: Using Surveillance to Promote Public Health, Examples from PRAMS*. Atlanta, GA: Division of Reproductive Health, National Centers for Chronic disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002.

As a collection of oral health data, this document will serve as the evidence base for the development of a state oral health plan. This plan will bring together a variety of partners to define goals and strategies to address issues and achieve optimal oral health for all.

The ultimate goal of this report is to help prevent unnecessary suffering from oral diseases, especially when so much is known about how to prevent them and their consequences.

**This report, as well as summary fact sheets, are available in an electronic format at the Oral Health Program website [http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Oral\\_Health/burden.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Oral_Health/burden.htm).**