

Action for Dental Health Act 2017

H.R. 2422

The American Dental Association (ADA) urges you to cosponsor the “Action for Dental Health Act 2017” (H.R. 2422), introduced by Reps. Robin Kelly (D-Ill.) and Mike Simpson (R-Idaho).

The bill would allow organizations to qualify for Health and Human Services (HHS) oral health grants to support activities that improve oral health education and dental disease prevention. The grants would also be used to develop and expand outreach programs establishing dental homes for children and adults, including the elderly, blind and disabled.

H.R. 2422 would support initiatives that have the greatest impact on dental access disparities, including:

Volunteer Dental Projects

Programs like Give Kids A Smile and Missions of Mercy provide important platforms for dentists to deliver care directly to those in need.

- Each year, approximately 450,000 children benefit from 1,500 Give Kids A Smile events nationwide. Missions of Mercy events across America have served more than 100,000 patients, providing nearly \$50 million in free services since 2000.
- These programs, along with the free and discounted care that individual dentists provide every day, add up to an estimated \$2.6 billion per year.

Action for Dental Health

ADH initiatives deliver care *now* to people already suffering with dental disease, strengthen and expand the public/private safety net, and bring dental health education and disease prevention into underserved communities.

- Reduce the number of people who visit the emergency room for a dental condition by referring them to dental practices, where they can receive proper dental care.¹ Emergency room visits for dental problems cost nearly \$3 billion during the period from 2008 through 2010, according to a study in the Journal of the American Dental Association (April 2014, Vol. 145:4, pp. 331-337). The study noted that dental emergency room care costs more than regular care by oral health professionals. Also, most emergency room visits only provide patients with pain medication and don't treat the underlying problem.
- Ensure more Americans have access to fluoridated drinking water.² Fluoride in drinking water yields \$38 in savings for \$1 invested; nursing home residents unable to travel receive care where they live.

¹ According to the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, the number of dental ER visits in the U.S. increased from 1.1 million in 2000 to 2.1 million in 2010. A separate study shows that in 2009, dental caries (the disease that causes cavities) and abscesses alone – almost entirely preventable conditions – accounted for nearly 80 percent of dental-related ER visits.

² Endorsed by U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin, MD (PDF) as “one of the most effective choices communities can make to

- Strengthen collaborations with other health professionals and organizations.³

The American Dental Association urges you to cosponsor the “Action for Dental Health Act 2017” (H.R. 2422).

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prevent health problems while actually improving the oral health of their citizens,” community water fluoridation programs benefit everyone, especially those without access to regular dental care. For most cities, every \$1 invested in water fluoridation yields \$38 savings in dental treatment costs. That’s why the ADA and state dental associations are working with state and local governments to extend the proven health benefits of community water fluoridation to the greatest possible number of people.

³ Better collaboration among dental and medical professionals can be a means to ensure all Americans understand their dental health is a crucial part of their overall health. The dental health of a pregnant woman or a mother can affect the health of the baby. Maintaining good oral hygiene is one element to maintaining optimal overall health for people living with such conditions as diabetes or HIV. With minimal training, physicians, nurses, educators and others can dramatically increase the number of patients and caregivers who receive basic dental health education. These professionals also can be trained to recognize conditions needing diagnosis and possible treatment by a dentist.