

MEDIA RELEASE
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Coalition Releases Oral Health Plan for Massachusetts

Leading advocates announce plan at Statehouse for improving access and reducing disparities in oral health

Boston – Leading oral health advocates in Massachusetts gathered at the State House on Monday for the release of a comprehensive, 5-year plan to improve oral health across the state. The plan represents over a year-and-a-half of work by the *Better Oral Health For Massachusetts Coalition*, a group comprising providers, lawmakers, state oral health officials, insurers, health advocates, policy leaders and consumers, dedicated to improving access to oral health services and eliminating disparities in oral health, especially for children of low-income and minority households.

Despite the state's progress in expanding medical coverage and primary care under the 2006 health care reform law, a 2008 report by the Catalyst Institute's report, *The Oral Health of Massachusetts*, funded by Delta Dental of Massachusetts, found significant gaps in access to preventive oral health services across the Commonwealth. According to the 2008 report, approximately 48 percent of children under the age of 9 suffer from tooth decay and 1 of 10 children from low-income and minority households reported suffering mouth pain while at school. Left untreated, tooth decay can inhibit learning, speech, and eating, and result in lower educational attainment and overall health status.

The *Better Oral Health For Massachusetts Coalition* was formed in 2008 following a statewide leadership summit held in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. During the State House release of the plan, speakers representing government, dental care providers and community resources spoke of the importance of oral health and its connection to overall health.

"Oral health is a critical component of our overall health and it is time we in the state fully recognize this fact," said **Mary Ellen Yankosky**, RDH, a co-chair of the Coalition. "The plan represents over a year-and-a-half of work by over 100 individuals and organizations to improve oral health through a comprehensive review of all policies and programs that affect how oral health services are provided."

Speakers at the launch of the Massachusetts Oral Health Plan included Representative **John Scibak**, (D, 2nd Hampshire District) House Chair of the Oral Health Legislative Caucus; **Lauren Smith**, MD, MPH, Medical Director for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health; **Barbara Ferrer**, PhD, MPH, Med, Executive Director of the Boston Public Health Commission; **Mina Paul**, DMD, MPH, Chair of the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Dentistry; **Lynda Young**, MD, Vice President of the Massachusetts Medical Society; **John Fisher**, DDS, President-Elect of the Massachusetts Dental Society; **Jamie Russell**, RDH, President Elect of the Massachusetts Dental Hygienists' Association; **James W. Hunt**, Jr., MUA, CAE,

Better Oral Health for Massachusetts Coalition

President and CEO of the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers; **Frank Robinson**, PhD., Executive Director of Partners for a Healthier Community in Springfield; and **Dennis Leonard**, President of Delta Dental of Massachusetts.

The Coalition's plan aims to improve the system of oral health services in Massachusetts through a multifaceted strategy, including increasing access to preventive services, broadening oral health literacy, developing the oral health workforce, and strengthening disease surveillance. The plan focuses on cost-effective strategies and building public-private partnerships at local, regional and statewide levels.

"This Massachusetts Oral Health Plan relies on proven and cost-effective strategies that work in preventing oral disease," said **Fay Donohue, CEO of Delta Dental of Massachusetts**. "The members of the coalition were committed to solving the problems identified in the Catalyst Institute's report. Now we need to make sure that all residents have access to preventive services and treatment."

Ralph Fuccillo, President of the DentaQuest Foundation served as master of ceremonies for the launch of the plan. The DentaQuest Foundation has been the primary supporter of the Better Oral Health for Massachusetts Coalition through in-kind and financial contributions. The DentaQuest Foundation is committed to optimal oral health for all Americans through support of prevention and access to affordable oral health care. For more information please visit dentaquestfoundation.org.

About *The Better Oral Health for Massachusetts Coalition*

For more information about the Oral Health Plan or the Better Oral Health for Massachusetts Coalition, please visit www.massoralhealth.org.

The Better Oral Health for Massachusetts Coalition was established in 2008 as a broad-based statewide collaborative of programs, providers (dentists, dental hygienists, physicians and other health providers), lawmakers, state oral health officials, insurers, health advocates, policy leaders and consumers. Its aim is to improve the oral health of residents of the Commonwealth with a focus on improving access to care, reducing disparities, and promoting equity in Massachusetts' oral health.

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