

A Healthy Mouth Starts with Good Vision

Oral Health/ Overall Health Access to Care

Prevention

Imagine a world where:

- Everyone recognizes the importance of good oral health as it relates to total health and well-being.
- Every adult and child in Massachusetts has access to oral health services regardless of ability to pay.
- Every child has at least one comprehensive dental exam prior to entering school and where no child ever has to suffer in silence from tooth pain because he or she can't afford treatment.
- Thousands of dentists participate in the state's MassHealth Program, providing care to underserved populations; more dentists choose to work in community health centers; and dental students practice in these settings while in school or as part of a loan repayment or tuition reimbursement program after graduation.
- Retired dentists can voluntarily donate the same services they provided when they were in active practice.
- The death rate for oral cancer declines dramatically through public education about risk factors and by early detection, and anti-tobacco funds are utilized to discourage not just the use of cigarettes, but also the use of smokeless tobacco.
- Community water fluoridation is available in every city and town in Massachusetts that can have access to it.
- Soda and sugary snacks are no longer accessible to students through vending machines in schools.
- Mouthquards are required protection for every child participating in any contact sport, thus preventing thousands of injuries and saving families hundreds of thousands of dollars in dental costs.

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) imagines such a world, and that's why we have spent more than a year developing the **Call to ACTION**, a comprehensive vision plan to improve the oral health of all residents in the Commonwealth by the year 2013. The **Call to ACTION**, which was officially released in February, focuses on three targeted goals: Oral Health/Overall Health, Access to Care, and Prevention. Specific objectives are described within each goal.

The Oral Health/Overall Health Goal looks at the importance of a healthy mouth in relation to a healthy body, and includes an objective requiring every child entering school for the first time to have a dental examination performed by a dentist. The MDS filed a bill—An Act Relative to Pupil Dental Health—regarding this objective in the state legislature earlier this year as part of its legislative agenda.

The Access to Care Goal addresses the need for all Massachusetts residents to have access to dental care. Objectives of this goal include: increasing the number of dentists participating in the MassHealth dental program, which the MDS has been successfully striving to do for more than a year; enhancing the state's oral health structure; increasing the capacity of community health centers; and filing and working to enact the Volunteer Dental License Bill, creating opportunities for retired dentists to provide care to underserved populations.

The Prevention Goal seeks to educate the public and legislators on the importance of preventive measures to avoid future oral health problems, such as tooth decay and orofacial injuries. Objectives of this goal include: supporting community water fluoridation; filing legislation requiring students at all levels of school to wear mouthquards in contact sports; funding anti-smokeless tobacco education initiatives; and supporting legislation to ban the sale of soda, fruit juices, sports drinks, and sugary snacks from school vending machines.

Just as the obstacles to good oral health for all Massachusetts residents didn't surface overnight, the solutions won't come immediately. And the MDS needs the support and partnership of a wide range of groups and concerned citizens to work collaboratively in finding practical and meaningful ways to address these issues. With the Call to ACTION, it's the MDS's hope that we will have constructed a solid foundation on which together we can build a strong oral health care system that can be sustained for many years to come. •



For more information or to request a copy of the Call to ACTION, please call (888) MDS-2013 or visit **www.massdental.org/calltoaction**.