

February 26, 2010

Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors Statement on The Pew Center on the States, Pew Children's Dental Campaign report, *The Cost of Delay: State Dental Policies Fail One in Five Children.*

The February 23rd release of *The Cost of Delay: State Dental Policies Fail One in Five Children* is the latest report to demonstrate that there remain great challenges facing all states. The report, a collaboration of the Pew Center on the States, the DentaQuest Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, utilizes eight measures as benchmarks to assess states' performance in assuring their citizens' oral health. The report assigns a grade of "A" to six states meeting at least 6 benchmarks, "B" to 9 states meeting 5 benchmarks, "C" to 20 states meeting 4 benchmarks, "D" to 6 states meeting 3 benchmarks, and "F" to 9 states meeting two or fewer benchmarks.

"It is laudable that Pew is attempting to increase policy makers' awareness of the oral health crisis in the US. This 50-state assessment may be weakened by its reliance on a simple grading methodology to describe the complex problems facing states. Evaluating all states by a limited set of benchmarks, including some with unproven efficacy and outdated information, measuring performance against unweighted and unstandardized variables, and incorporating no means to consider the characteristics of each state's challenges or successes in oral health seems to fall short of Pew's goal" says Margaret M. Snow, DMD, President of the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD). Dr. Snow goes on to say, "Although ASTDD supported Pew in collecting some data for this report, it did not support the foundation's use of a grading format, or the inclusion of benchmarks that have not been demonstrated to produce positive results. ASTDD believes that states should be supported in developing policies based on local needs, and in implementing evidence-based programs with measurable outcomes to address those needs."

ASTDD membership consists of the chief dental public health officers (state dental directors) of state and territorial health departments or equivalent agencies and public agencies, voluntary organizations, tribal entities and/or health professionals employed or interested in dental public health. ASTDD mission is to provide leadership to promote a governmental oral health presence in each state and territory, to formulate and promote sound oral health policy, to increase awareness of oral health issues, and to assist in the development of initiatives for prevention and control of oral diseases. We provide states with guidance for developing strong oral health programs based on proven best practices consistent with public health core functions and the ten essential public health services as well as the ASTDD Competencies for State Oral Health Programs.

The Association encourages policymakers, funders, the media and other interested parties to contact state oral health programs in their states to obtain current data and learn about efforts to achieve these and other oral health priorities. Contact information for individual state oral health programs can be found at www.astdd.org. Click on the Member/Associate member roster on the sidebar.

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