

## **Problem**

Great strides have been made over the past 50 years in improving the oral health of Americans, however, public health challenges remain and significant disparities persist.<sup>1</sup> While most of the gains are a result of effective prevention and treatment efforts, some Americans still do not have access to preventive services.<sup>1,2,3</sup> People who have the least access to preventive services and treatment suffer greater rates of oral diseases.<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6</sup> These challenges are further complicated by complex social, psychological, economic, and cultural factors, and health behaviors (e.g., tobacco use, excessive alcohol consumption, poor diet choices that increase the risk of oral disease), that inhibit seeking care and lead to unmet dental needs and increased costs of later treatment.<sup>1,5</sup> Social determinants also impact oral health. People with lower education and income levels, certain racial/ethnic groups and people with disabilities or chronic health conditions are more likely to experience poor oral health.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>

Oral health problems are widespread, largely preventable, sometimes painful and costly. In 2011, \$108.4 billion was spent on dental services in the U.S.<sup>7</sup> Tooth decay affects more than one-fourth of U.S. children aged 2-5 years and one-half of children aged 12-15 years.<sup>5,8,9</sup> Gum disease affects a large proportion of adults and advanced stage disease affects four to 12 percent of U.S. adults.<sup>5,8</sup> One-fourth of U.S. adults aged 65 and older have lost all of their teeth.<sup>5,8,9</sup> More than 7,800 people, mostly older Americans, die from oral and pharyngeal cancers each year.<sup>5,10</sup> There is a rise in the incidence of oropharyngeal cancer linked to the human papilloma virus (HPV).<sup>11,12</sup>

Oral health is an essential component of overall health and well-being. Oral diseases, whether dental caries, periodontal disease, or oral cancer, if left untreated, can result in pain, disability, poor nutrition, and dysfunctional speech, as well as concentration problems, poor appearance, low self-esteem, absenteeism from school or work and premature death. Adults and children alike have unmet dental needs, which influence growth and development and ability to function productively. Oral diseases/symptoms also may be risk factors and/or early indicators of other systemic diseases.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence-based preventive interventions exist and have been identified by the Community Preventive Services Task Force<sup>13</sup> and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force<sup>14</sup> but remain underutilized. Most oral diseases are preventable, but many children and adults don't take advantage of simple measures that are proven effective in preventing oral diseases and reducing oral health care costs.<sup>5</sup>

## Methods

Healthy People 2020 provides a comprehensive set of national goals and objectives for improving the health of all Americans. The Healthy People 2020 oral health objectives address public health improvement by striving to increase awareness that oral health is essential to overall health. The objectives also seek to increase the acceptance and use of preventive interventions, achieve health equity and reduce disparities in access to oral health services.<sup>1</sup>

For the past two decades, Healthy People has been instrumental in driving the maintenance of existing oral health programs and the implementation of new ones, and the development of new policies. Healthy People 2020 sets new priorities for the next decade. For the first time, oral health has been selected as a leading health indicator signifying the high priority that oral health has been given towards improving the nation's health as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

The ability to access oral health care is associated with age, gender, education level, socio-economic status, racial/ethnic disparities, access to medical insurance and geographic location.<sup>16</sup> Potential Healthy People 2020 strategies to address these issues include:

- “Implementing and evaluating activities that have an impact on health behavior.
- Promoting interventions to reduce tooth decay, such as dental sealants and fluoride use.
- Evaluating and improving methods of monitoring oral diseases and conditions.
- Increasing the capacity of State dental health programs to provide preventive oral health services.
- Increasing the number of community health centers with an oral health component.”<sup>1</sup>

Healthy People 2020 provides a framework to measure progress for health issues in specific populations and serves as a foundation for prevention and wellness activities at the national, state and local levels. State oral health programs play an important role in implementing health promotion and disease prevention programs. The [Guidelines for State and Territorial Oral Health Programs](#) provides a matrix of oral health program roles and activities to accomplish the Ten Essential Public Health Services to Promote Oral Health.

### Policy Statement

The Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD) endorses and supports the HP2020 National Health Objectives to achieve health equity, eliminate disparities and improve the health of all groups. ASTDD strongly encourages the development and achievement of state Healthy People 2020 oral health objectives and related activities to prevent and control oral and craniofacial diseases, conditions, and injuries and improve access to oral health services. Oral health is essential to overall health and should be an integral part of each state's Healthy People 2020 plan.

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- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *A National Call to Action to Promote Oral Health*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. NIH Publication No. 03-5303; May 2003.
- <sup>4</sup> Dye BA, Tan S, Smith V, et al. Trends in oral health status: United States, 1988-1994 and 1999-2004. *Vital Health Stat 11*. 2007(248):1-92.
- <sup>5</sup> National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). *Oral health: Preventing Cavities, Gum Disease, Tooth Loss, and Oral Cancers: At a Glance 2011*. Atlanta, GA:2011. <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/aag/pdf/2011/Oral-Health-AAG-PDF-508.pdf>. Accessed August 9, 2013.
- <sup>6</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). Medicaid: Extent of dental disease in children has not decreased and millions are estimated to have untreated tooth decay. (GAO-08-1211). 2008:46.
- <sup>7</sup> Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. *National Health Expenditures 2011 Highlights*. 2011. <http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/NationalHealthExpendData/Downloads/highlights.pdf>. Accessed September 17, 2013.
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- <sup>10</sup> Greenlee RT, Murray T, Bolden S, Wingo PA. Cancer statistics, 2000. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2000; 50(1):7-33. <http://www.tcsg.org/tobacco/CancerStat2000.pdf>. Accessed October 3, 2013.
- <sup>11</sup> Jemal A, Simard EP, Dorell C, et al. Annual Report to the Nation on the Status of Cancer, 1975-2009, featuring the burden and trends in human papillomavirus (HPV)-associated cancers and HPV vaccination coverage levels. *J Natl Cancer Inst*. 2013;105(3):175-201. <http://jnci.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2013/01/03/jnci.djs491.full>. Accessed September 3, 2013.
- <sup>12</sup> Chaturvedi AK, Engels EA, Pfeiffer RM, et al. Human papillomavirus and rising oropharyngeal cancer incidence in the United States. *J Clin Oncol*. 2011;29(32):4294-4301. <http://jco.ascopubs.org/content/29/32/4294.full.pdf+html>. Accessed October 10, 2013.
- <sup>13</sup> Community Preventive Services Task Force. <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/oral/index.html>. Accessed August 31, 2013.
- <sup>14</sup> U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/index.html>. Accessed August 31, 2013.
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