

Bridge to Healthy Smiles Coalition Grows with New Members - *Coalition working with lawmakers, others to help solve state's oral health care crisis*

CHICAGO—(May 26, 2009) Since launching a statewide campaign in 2007 to address Illinois' oral health care crisis where nearly two million residents go without dental care, the Bridge to Healthy Smiles coalition has garnered the support of two dozen member organizations, who collectively represent more than 250,000 dentists, pediatricians, and oral health care advocates throughout the state.

Founded by the Illinois State Dental Society, the Bridge to Healthy Smiles coalition includes: the Illinois Faith Based Association; Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition; Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics; Lincoln Dental Society; Ounce of Prevention; Illinois Society of Pediatric Dentists; Provena Covenant Medical Center; Rogers Park Oral Health Advisory Committee; Hispanic Dental Association; Heartland International Health Center; The Arc of Illinois; Cook County Department of Public Health; City of Chicago's Department of Children and Youth Services, Alliance of the Illinois State Dental Society, IFLOSS Coalition, Chicago Community Oral Health Forum, March of Dimes, SmileHealthy, Oral Health America, The Children's Clinic, Illinois Dental Hygienists' Association, Champaign County Health Care Consumers and Illinois Head Start Association.

"We're thrilled to become a new member of this coalition and believe that we can be a valuable resource and effective partner," said Elizabeth Lippitt, Executive Director of The Children's Clinic, "Too many families and children are suffering from poor oral health because they can't afford or access the care they need and deserve. We're working to change that."

Currently Illinois has among the lowest funding rates in the nation for many dental procedures. Over that last three decades while funding for government health care programs has decreased enrollment has risen, forcing many much needed dental clinics to close its doors. Illinois has just one dental clinic for every 8,400 children enrolled in government-insured programs.

The coalition recently announced its support of legislation that would increase the sales tax on soft drinks to help fund dental care programs. The measure is part of a three-point legislative plan that includes appropriating \$94 million to increase funding rates for Medicaid payments, funding the opening of 10 dental clinics and the creation of a dental student incentive program.

"No other organization has stepped up to the plate to put this issue front and center," said Lisa Bilbrey, Director of the IFLOSS Coalition, "We fully support the coalition's legislative agenda because we believe it's sensible, fiscally responsible, and is a real solution."

To learn more about the Bridge to Healthy Smiles visit www.bridgetohealthysmiles.com.