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Governor Signs Legislation to Fund Construction of New Dental Clinics

\$2 million will go towards funding up to 10 new dental clinics in underserved Illinois counties

CHICAGO—(July 29, 2009)—Oral health care advocates throughout the state applaud Governor Pat Quinn for signing key pieces of legislation that will fund the construction of new dental clinics in underserved areas. Governor Quinn signed into law SB 1393, which establishes procedures for awarding grants to communities waiting to open a dental clinic. Additionally, \$2 million to fund the construction of dental clinics was included in the Capitol Bill that became law on July 13, 2009. While there is still more progress to be made the Bridge to Healthy Smiles Coalition says it is pleased with the campaign's accomplishments.

“These key pieces of legislation will help countless families by opening the door to dental treatment,” says Lisa Bilbrey, Coordinator of IFLOSS. “We witness parents and their children struggle every day because the state has turned its back on these families by continuing to ignore the oral health care crisis in this state. These dental clinics will be the pride of underserved communities and we look forward to many grand opening celebrations.”

Over the last three decades funding for government health care programs has stagnated but, enrollment has risen. With the recession and additional budget cuts, many dental clinics have closed. According to federal government data, low-income residents in more than 60 percent of all Illinois counties lack access to dental care. This means millions of Illinoisans face barriers in accessing dental services. As of 2008, the Illinois Department of Public Health listed 168 community-based dental clinics operating in Illinois – a ratio of just one clinic for every 8,400 children enrolled in Medicaid. However, some clinics perform only limited procedures such as exams, cleanings, and fillings and operate only part-time hours. Of the 49 health centers located in Illinois schools, only six offer dental services. Clinics are overwhelmed with dental demand and many people wait months for an appointment. The coalition estimates that \$2 million will be enough to open 10 dental clinics which could annually serve over 35,000 additional patients.



“We know that having cavities www.BridgeToHealthySmiles.com can link one to long term health risks like heart disease, oral cancer and diabetes. We know that although tooth decay is preventable, it is still the most common chronic disease of children”, says Dr. Melissa Vargas, President of the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. “Funding dental clinics to serve as dental homes is the first step in making sure our children grow up to be healthy, happy and confident adults.”

“We commend Governor Quinn for his leadership and for his steadfast commitment to the millions of hard working Illinois families who suffer because they do not have access to important dental services,” says Dr. Joseph Unger, President of the Illinois State Dental Society. “This is a big first step in our campaign to address the need for oral health care funding. Our new goal is to raise reimbursement rates so more dentists can afford to treat Medicaid patients.”

Currently state funding for dental procedures is ranked among the lowest in the nation. Dentist’s who treat Medicaid patients receive an average of just 46 percent of the procedure cost which makes it unaffordable for dentist’s to treat Medicaid patients.

Senate Majority Leader James F. Clayborne, Jr. (D-Belleville) was the chief sponsor of SB 1393 which allows for grants to be awarded to build public infrastructures for dental care and to make grants to local health departments, federally qualified health centers and rural health clinics for development of comprehensive dental clinics. The primary purpose of these clinics is to increase dental access for low-income families who do not currently have access to dental services. The dental clinic must be willing to accept out-of-area clients, including emergency services for adults and early and periodic screening, diagnosis and treatment for children.

66 of 102 Illinois counties have been designated by the federal government as Dental Health Professions Shortage Areas. These areas will receive special priority for grants under this program (to view a map of underserved Illinois counties visit www.bridgetohealthysmiles.com).

About Bridge to Healthy Smiles Coalition: The Bridge to Healthy Smiles campaign is led by a diverse coalition working to improve oral health across the state. Coalition members include: Illinois State Dental Society, 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; Provena United Samaritans 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 www.BridgeToHealthySmiles.com 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, Champaign County Health Care Consumers, Illinois Dental Hygienists' Association, Smiles for All – Quad City Health Initiatives, and Illinois Head Start Association.

To learn more about the Bridge to Healthy Smiles campaign, to view the "Bridge to Healthy Smiles" video and to download broadcast quality video, please visit bridgetohealthysmiles.com.

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