



For Immediate Release

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COUNTY BOARD TAKES ACTION CITING AN 'ORAL HEALTHCARE CRISIS' IN COOK COUNTY
Department of Public Health Ordered to Take Inventory of Dental Services and Resources

(Chicago, IL) October 19, 2010-Today the Bridge to Healthy Smiles Coalition announces its support for a resolution introduced by 9th District Cook County Commissioner Pete Silvestri that highlights the importance of increasing access to oral healthcare services in Cook County. The resolution brings to light the oral healthcare "crisis" in Cook County and asks that the Cook County Department of Public Health gather important data as a first step to bridging the oral healthcare gap.

Large portions of Cook County have been designated as a Dental Health Professional Shortage (HPSA) area by the federal government. Often referred to as "underserved", residents in these areas have limited access to local dental care. According to the Bridge to Healthy Smiles Coalition, the Cook County healthcare system is overwhelmed with patient volume and lacks the resources to care for the dental needs of its residents. Based on 2008 data obtained by the coalition, the Illinois Department of Public Health lists 168 community-based dental clinics. Only 30 percent of these clinics are located in Cook County, by far the most densely populated area in Illinois, and many operate part-time. It is estimated that one-third of the underserved population in Illinois lives in Cook County, which means barriers to accessing care for these residents is the most critical in the state. The result is that thousands of Cook County residents go without dental treatment and in many cases children and adults end up in hospital emergency rooms, an unnecessary cost to taxpayers and a painful and humiliating experience for the patient. When care is available, many are forced to wait months for routine treatment and sometimes up to a year for specialty dental care.

"Hardworking Cook County families suffer every day because they are denied access to critical dental care," says Anne Clancy of the Chicago Community Oral Health Forum. "The county has cut dental services and closed clinics while the number of children and adults who rely on government oral health care programs is on the rise."

The resolution highlights the fact that Illinois has one of the lowest reimbursement rates in the nation for government healthcare and that more than 1.4 million Cook County residents are registered for government healthcare, nearly half of the states public aid population. The resolution acknowledges that the number of public aid patients continues to increase while funding for critical dental programs remains unfunded. It further cites that there is a medically proven link between overall health and oral

health stating that studies show that poor oral health may be linked to heart disease, stroke, pre-term childbirth and oral cancer.

“We need to gather all of the facts so we can make an accurate and strategic plan to determine exactly where and why there are barriers to critical dental care,” says 9th District Cook County Commissioner Pete Silvestri. “Once the Department of Public Health provides us with the necessary information, we can begin taking steps to ensure that Cook County residents do not suffer because of inadequate access to dental services.”

“We commend Commissioner Silvestri for his leadership on this issue and thank him for representing the interests of thousands of Cook County residents who are in desperate need of dental services,” says Dr. Michael Stablein, President of the Chicago Dental Society. “We look forward to analyzing the data provided by the Department of Public Health and will continue to work with Commissioner Silvestri to ensure that Cook County residents receive the quality care they so desperately desire and deserve.”

A Surgeon General’s report on oral health documented linkages between oral disease and ear and sinus infections, weakened immune systems, diabetes, heart and lung disease as well many other serious health conditions. Poor oral health as a child can lead to long-term health implications and is proven to impact a child's self esteem and ability to excel in school.

In Cook County:

- There is just one clinic for every 15,700 children who rely on public aid.
- 48.5 percent of third graders have experienced cavities and 26.6 percent have untreated cavities and in Chicago 63.5 percent of third graders have experienced cavities and 35.6 percent have untreated cavities.

The resolution concludes by ordering that the Department of Public Health collect an inventory of county dental services, resources, equipment, staff and patients served and submit this information to the County Board within 45-days. To view the resolution visit www.bridgetohealthysmiles.com.

About the 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 Health; 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; Champaign County Health Care Consumers; Illinois Dental Hygienists’ Association; Smiles for All – Quad City Health Initiative; St. Bernard Hospital and Health Care Center; Dentistry for Children, Miles of Smiles, Ltd.; Happy Teeth => Happy Kids; Erie Family Health Center and Illinois Head Start Association.

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