Oral diseases affect what we eat, how we look, the way we communicate, and how we feel about ourselves. They can also affect academic success and economic productivity by limiting our ability to learn, work and succeed. In addition to the life-threatening conditions that can result from oral infections, recent studies associate poor oral health with cardiovascular disease and diabetes. Oral diseases also put a significant strain on our health care system. For example, the cost associated with treating patients with nontraumatic dental problems in Michigan’s hospitals and emergency departments was estimated at $15.4 million in 2011. The toll of these diseases is all the more tragic because they are almost entirely preventable, and the cost of prevention is far lower than the cost of treatment. The State of Michigan’s oral health surveillance system collects information on the statewide incidence of oral diseases.

INFANTS AND CHILDREN
Tooth decay—the result of an oral infection—is Michigan’s most common chronic childhood disease, with rates up to four times higher than that of asthma. According to the 2010 Michigan Count Your Smile Survey, 58 percent of third-graders have experienced tooth decay. In addition to the needless suffering childhood dental problems cause, they frequently interfere with social development and academic success. Children with poor oral health are nearly three times more likely than other children to miss school. Nationally, children miss more than 51 million school hours each year due to dental pain. Furthermore, a 2012 study of elementary and high school students, undertaken by researchers from University of Southern California’s Ostrow School of Dentistry, found that “students with toothaches were almost four times more likely to have a low grade-point average” than their peers who did not report recent tooth pain. Prenatal oral care is crucial to preventing early childhood oral disease, as is a comprehensive dental screening and risk assessment by age 1. Unfortunately, fewer than 50 percent of expecting mothers in Michigan receive an oral exam during pregnancy, and only 31 percent of children ages 1 to 3 have had a dental visit in the past year.

ADULTS AND SENIORS
Most adult Michiganders suffer from some degree of dental caries or gum disease. Only 66 percent of Michiganders ages 33 to 44 still have all their teeth, while 13 percent of the population age 65 and above has lost all their teeth. Although regular dental visits are especially important for people with diabetes, 34 percent of Michiganders with diabetes have not had a dental visit in the past year.

ECONOMIC COSTS AND HEALTH DISPARITIES
Just as oral health is inseparable from systemic health, the costs associated with oral disease are inseparable from Michigan’s systemic health care costs. Lifelong preventive dental care can reduce the economic burden not just of chronic oral disease, but also of high cost visits to hospital emergency rooms for tooth pain, abscesses, infections and other acute problems. However, studies show that a high percentage of Michiganders are not currently receiving timely preventive care. Only about three-fourths of Michigan adults visit the dentist at least once a year. Racial, economic and geographic factors strongly affect access to timely prevention and treatment. People of color and rural Michiganders receive dental care at rates well below the state average, as do Michiganders at lower income and education levels. Accordingly, rates of tooth decay and gum disease are much higher among these populations. For example, children in the Northern Lower Peninsula had the highest percent of immediate dental needs and a high percent of toothache experience.

Sources:
1 - The Cost of Dental-Related Emergency Room Visits in Michigan, Anderson Economic Group, 2014
2, 3, 4 - Burden of Oral Disease, Michigan Department of Community Health, 2013
CALL TO ACTION
Expand the Healthy Kids Dental program to every Michigan county ensuring children receive the care they need for a healthy mouth, and a healthy body. As of today, Kent, Oakland and Wayne county children (395,000) enrolled in Medicaid have a more difficult time in accessing dental care.

AN INVESTMENT IN MICHIGAN’S CHILDREN
• Children with Healthy Kids Dental coverage continue to have higher dental service utilization rates than children with fee-for-service Medicaid dental coverage.

• Prevention pays off. The average cost of applying a dental sealant to a child’s permanent teeth—a practice that reduces the risk of decay—is less than one-third the cost of filling a cavity.

• In addition, children with Healthy Kids Dental coverage travel, on average, 7.6 miles to receive dental care as compared to 24.5 miles under the state-administered Medicaid dental program. As you can imagine, the availability of care closer to home has a significant positive impact on access to care.

BACKGROUND
Healthy Kids Dental is a public private/partnership between Michigan Department of Community Health and Delta Dental. In this program, participating dentists accept payment from Delta Dental for services such as x-rays, exams, sealants, fillings, dentures, and emergency treatments. This program is currently available to Medicaid-eligible children (under the age of 21) in 80 counties in Michigan, and has approximately 600,000 enrollees. Although Michigan’s Medicaid program includes dental benefits for children, most dentists do not accept Medicaid-enrolled patients. In contrast, nearly 80% of dentists in those counties participate in Healthy Kids Dental. This difference can partially be attributed to reimbursement rates in the Healthy Kids Dental program. These rates are lower than the median rate charged by Michigan dentists, but higher than the rate reimbursed by Medicaid.
Many Americans now enjoy markedly better oral health than did their parents. However, certain segments of the population still have severe dental decay, much of which remains untreated.

*Healthy People 2020* objectives seek to eliminate these disparities, so that all Americans receive the benefits of good oral health. Community-based programs such as community water fluoridation and school-based dental sealant programs are particularly effective and cost-saving.

**AN INVESTMENT IN ALL MICHIGANDERS**

- Drinking water with the optimal level of fluoride reduces tooth decay by about 25 percent for children and adults.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that every $1 invested in water fluoridation saves $38 in dental treatment costs.
- School-based dental sealant programs are cost saving when delivered to populations at high-risk for tooth decay, such as children in low-income households.

**COMMUNITY WATER FLUORIDATION**

- CDC recognizes community water fluoridation as 1 of 10 great public health achievements of the 20th century.
- Community water fluoridation still prevents tooth decay even though people now also get fluoride from other sources such as toothpaste, rinses, and other topical applications at the dental office.
- At present, more than 7 million people statewide are receiving the benefits of community water fluoridation.

**SEALANTS**

- Only 26.6 percent of Michigan third grade children had at least one sealant present upon examination—second lowest among all states.
- The combination of sealants and fluoride has the potential to nearly eliminate tooth decay in school aged children.
- Sealants are most cost-effective when provided to children who are at highest risk for tooth decay.

### Dental Sealant Payment Rate, 2014

<table>
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<th>MI Medicaid</th>
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*Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Michigan Department of Community Health*
Michigan Oral Health Coalition is a 501c3 non-profit organization whose mission is to improve oral health in Michigan by focusing on prevention, health promotion, oral health data, access and the link between oral health and overall health. With members throughout the state, the Coalition is comprised of primary care clinicians, oral health clinicians, dental benefit providers, advocacy and provider organizations, state and local government officials, and consumers working together to improve oral health in Michigan.

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**BACKGROUND**

Oral health plays a significant role in general health and well-being throughout the lifespan. Yet, “a silent epidemic” of oral disease is affecting our most vulnerable citizens—children, the elderly, people with special needs, and adults who lack access to affordable dental care. Dental disease has been associated with such chronic diseases as diabetes, stroke and heart disease. Further, recent reports correlate increased risk for poor birth and pregnancy outcomes such as preterm, low birth weight and gestational diabetes to dental disease.

Strides have been made in Michigan to improve access to oral health preventive measures such as community water fluoridation, fluoride varnish for ages 0 to 5, and school-based dental sealant programs. The gains made in increasing access through the expansion of Healthy Kids Dental and the maintenance of Medicaid adult dental are offset by Michigan’s slowly improving economic times. The Michigan Oral Health Coalition’s seeks to be the collective voice on oral health issues. For more information please contact us at 517.827.0466.