



The mission of the American Association for Dental Research (AADR) is to advance research and increase knowledge for the improvement of oral health; to support and represent the oral health research community; and to facilitate the communication and application for research findings.

The American Association for Dental Research (AADR) Statement on Oral Health Care within Health Care Reform

For largely historical reasons, the dental profession has evolved parallel to, but separately from, the medical profession. Medicine and dentistry have different educational, health care delivery and payment systems.

- Private employer-based dental insurance, developed later in the last Century than private employer-based medical insurance, is viewed as an “extra” benefit, as opposed to a minimally-required benefit. While 46 million Americans lack health insurance, approximately 130 million adults and children lack dental insurance – about 45% of the U.S. population.
- While Medicare, Medicaid, S-CHIP, and other public sources account for 46% of all national health expenditures, such Government programs account for less than 7% of our national dental expenditures. Only in 2009, has the S-CHIP program included a guaranteed dental benefit.

But the mouth and body are not separate biologic systems. Recent dental research findings are uncovering the full extent to which oral health is linked to general health.

The two most common dental diseases, dental caries (tooth decay) and periodontal disease (gum disease) are the sequelae of microbial infections. Yet for the more than 80 million American who have medical insurance, but no dental insurance, that infection is not covered. Further, periodontal infections result in a full body inflammatory response that may explain the association with other systemic diseases of inflammatory origin, such as cardiovascular disease.

Oral and pharyngeal cancer is the 8th leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the United States. Biomarkers found in saliva show promise to diagnose this cancer at an earlier stage and improve survival. Such life saving technology should be incorporated into our health care delivery system.

Recent research has shown associations not only between oral health and cardiovascular disease, but also between oral health and diabetes, oral health and obesity, and oral health and pancreatic cancer. Diabetologists and cardiologists are now

referring their patients for oral health care and dentists and periodontists (gum specialists) are referring their patients for medical evaluation.

Oral health research is the underpinning for good oral health, and has greatly affected the way oral health care is delivered. Thanks to a commitment in federal biomedical research funding, discoveries stemming from dental scientists have reduced the burden of oral disease and have led to better health for Americans. The introduction of fluoride into public water supplies, toothpaste, and professionally-applied preventive treatments has been one of the great successes in public health of the last Century.

However, advances in care and treatment models have not been shared equally by all Americans, and the physical and economic burden of oral disease continues to outweigh that of other more commonly covered diseases and conditions. More than 51 million school hours and 164 million hours of work are lost each year due to dental related absences. While continued dental research is essential to managing and one day eliminating oral disease, putting current knowledge into practice now is critical to improving oral health for all Americans.

In 2000, the U.S. Surgeon General called the nation's attention to the importance of oral health with the landmark report "Oral Health in America." The report recognized the associations between oral health and general health and called upon policy makers to "build an effective health infrastructure that meets the oral health needs of all Americans and integrates oral health effectively into overall health". Nearly a decade later, it's time to respond to the Surgeon General.

AADR Policy Recommendations:

- **Provide accessible and affordable oral health care to facilitate the application of dental research findings and to improve the oral health of all Americans**
- **As research has shown the interconnectedness between oral health and overall health, include the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of oral diseases in health care reform.**
- **Continue a sustained investment in biomedical research, including in the NIH National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research to further reduce the burden of oral diseases for all Americans.**

Approved by the AADR Board of Directors, June 19, 2009