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AADR Releases its Statement on Oral Health Care within Health Care Reform

Alexandria, Va. – On July 14, the American Association for Dental Research released its policy statement titled “Oral Health Care within Health Care Reform,” which focuses on the scientific base of oral health and its associations to other aspects of health.

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. 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 health research is the underpinning for good oral health, and has greatly affected the way oral health care is delivered. 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 has made the following 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.

The entire Statement is available on AADR’s Web site at www.iadr.org/JulyPolicyStatement.

About the American Association for Dental Research

The American Association for Dental Research (AADR) is the largest Division of the International Association for Dental Research (IADR). With nearly 4,000 members in the United States, its mission is: (1) to advance research and increase knowledge for the improvement of oral health; (2) to support and represent the oral health research community; and (3) to facilitate the communication and application of research findings.

To learn more about AADR, visit www.aadronline.org.