

July 21, 2009

The Honorable Diana DeGette
Member of Congress
2335 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515

The Honorable John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress
426 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

Dear Representatives DeGette and Sarbanes:

We, the undersigned organizations, write in support of your proposed amendment to the *America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009* to require that an oral health expert be added to the Health Benefits Advisory Committee. We thank you for your leadership on this critical issue and your tireless efforts to improve the oral health of all Americans.

As you know, oral health is essential to overall health. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, dental decay is the single most common chronic disease in children—and it is preventable. We have for far too long ignored this public health crisis. For every child who lacks medical coverage, two are without dental coverage. Further, a third of all adults have no dental coverage. For these reasons, including an oral health expert on the Health Benefits Advisory Committee is essential.

One of the major reasons why so many Americans suffer from preventable dental disease is the historic separation of oral health delivery and financing from the traditional medical system. The mouth is the only organ system that is not included in medical school training, and a similar separation exists across health professions. As a result, we cannot expect that our nation's oral health needs will be met absent the input of an expert in oral health.

By including an expert in oral health on the Health Benefits Advisory Committee, the outcome is guaranteed to be more effective and efficient. Such an expert will be able to identify research-based solutions to enhance primary and preventive care, while promoting early interventions to avoid pain, infection and inappropriate use of the emergency room.

We could not be more pleased of the inclusion of critical provisions in the current version of the bill that will improve Americans' oral health and this amendment would only strengthen those objectives. We thank you again for your leadership on this issue and stand ready to assist you in any way that we can.

Sincerely,

Children's Dental Health Project
American Association of Public Health Dentistry
Hispanic Dental Association
American Dental Hygienists' Association
American Association for Dental Research

First Focus
American Dental Education Association
Voices for America's Children
Pew Center on the States
National Association of Dental Plans
Dental Health Foundation
Oral Health America
Delta Dental of Massachusetts
The Dental Health Foundation
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
Medicaid/SCHIP Dental Association
United Methodist Health Ministry Fund
Oral Health Awareness Colorado!