September 21, 2009

The Honorable Max Baucus, Chairman

Senate Committee on Finance

U.S. Senate

Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Grassley, Ranking Member

Senate Committee on Finance

U.S. Senate

Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Baucus and Grassley:

The undersigned 15 national and state organizations write to congratulate you on the significant work on reforming the nation’s health care system, and to urge you to preserve oral health in the health care reform effort. None of us can eat, speak, smile, breathe, or learn successfully without good oral health. Just as your mouth is integral to your body, oral health is integral to overall health. Dental care is a great investment that pays off down the road for both children and adults. Provisions included in the Senate HELP Committee, The Finance Committee Chairman’s Mark, and the House Tri-Committee drafts will help make these essential health services available to additional Americans.

On behalf of this broad and diverse coalition, we urge you to do the following to maintain and improve oral health care within health care reform.

**Maintain current provisions**

* **The numerous oral health provisions contained in the House Tri‐Committee draft and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee bill must be preserved.** While these provisions do not address all concerns that have been raised, they are an excellent first step and must be preserved as the House and Senate bills are reconciled and sent to the President.

**Do no harm**

* **Assure oral health coverage when children transition off CHIP with at least the minimum requirements set out in CHIP legislation.** Without a guarantee that dental coverage for children will continue after the expiration of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), this legislation may leave low-income children worse off than they are today. It is important that this historic legislation ensures that dental coverage is not lost in the transition of benefits after the expiration of CHIP.
* **So as not to disrupt current coverage for tens of millions of families**, and in keeping with the Congress and Administration’s position to maintain coverage that works, the legislation should allow for the children's oral health benefit to be met by separate dental insurance plans.

**Consider three important amendments**

* **Universal insurance coverage must include universal dental coverage for children *and* adults, including children and adults with special health care needs.** For everychild without health insurance, two are without dental insurance. For every adult without health insurance, three are without dental insurance. We cannot improve access to care for families without enhancing coverage for adults. Health care reform must include coverage of adult dental services necessary to prevent disease and promote oral health, restore oral structures to health and function, and treat emergency conditions.
* **An expert in oral health must sit on any health advisory committee.** Without input from an oral health expert, we cannot ensure that oral health will be properly addressed in policies and insurance plans related to coverage, quality or effectiveness.
* **Take steps to correct existing problems with Medicaid dental program implementation while expanding Medicaid eligibility.**  Both bills currently expand Medicaid eligibility without addressing the underlying issue of insufficient reimbursement rates. Therefore, the legislation should be amended to incorporate concepts such as those in H.R. 2220 (the Essential Oral Health Care Act of 2009), which would enhance Medicaid matching payments for states that must also pursue specific Medicaid dental reforms.

Thank you for considering our shared views. Oral health matters. And fits uniquely well with Congress’ desire to focus on solutions that prevent unnecessary disease and utilize community-based approaches to improving health. We urge you to ensure that oral health has a place in health care reform legislation, and recommend the above priorities as a consensus agenda for oral health.

Oral Health America

Hispanic Dental Association

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

First Focus

United Methodist Health Ministry Fund

American Association for Dental Research

Dental Health Foundation (California)

Medicaid/SCHIP Dental Association

Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors

Pew Center on the States

American Association of Public Health Dentistry

National Head Start Association

National Consumers League

**American Dental Education Association**

American Dental Hygienists’ Association