



## 2009 – Media Talking Points



Give Kids A Smile Children's Dental Access Program was launched in February 2003 during National Children's Dental Health Month by the American Dental Association and is endorsed by the Wisconsin Dental Association and other state dental societies. GKAS focuses on combating what the U.S. Surgeon General called "a silent epidemic" of dental disease and encouraging parents, health professionals, policy-makers and everyone who cares about children to address this important health issue. **Since 2003, Wisconsin GKAS events have provided some \$2.8 million in donated dental care to 18,000 low-income children.**

### GKAS '09 FACTS

350 dentists and 648 dental hygienists and assistants, students from assisting and hygiene programs and Marquette University School of Dentistry, faculty from these schools and community volunteers will participate in Wisconsin GKAS events.

More than \$622,000 in oral hygiene education and dental care will be donated to 5,500 needy children. Nationwide, 12,100 dental professionals will provide services to 450,000 children.

### U.S. Surgeon General recognizes oral health as an integral part of a person's total health, with the dentist being the primary oral health care provider.

Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease affecting American children, five times more common than asthma.

The ADA and WDA recommend children see a dentist within six months of their first tooth erupting or by age 1. However, studies reveal only three out of five children have done so by the time they enter kindergarten. This inattention and other barriers to oral care means that for the first time in 20 years an increasing number (52 percent) of children ages 6 to 8 have tooth decay, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in its Healthy People 2010 oral health update.

Untreated oral disease has been linked to childhood infections and more catastrophic illnesses. Moderate tooth decay during childhood restricts physical development, decreases the ability to learn and requires frequent emergency room visits and hospitalization. In some cases, untreated oral disease has been linked to catastrophic illness, such as an abscess that led to a 12-year-old Maryland boy's death in 2007.

### The American Academy of Pediatrics (physicians) says 20 percent of all health care funds spent on children should be directed at improving and maintaining oral health.

In Wisconsin, state and federal governments combined spend *less than one percent*, or \$38 million of a \$4.4 billion annual Medicaid budget, on oral health programs for children *and* adults.

Eighty percent of states spend a higher percentage of MA dollars on dental care than Wisconsin does. Volunteer data collection shows individual WDA dentists donate an average of \$10,000 - \$12,000 in care annually through their private practices, in addition to services they provide through GKAS, non-reimbursed MA, WDA Foundation's Donated Dental Services, community clinics and other programs.

### Charitable care cannot fulfill the oral health care needs of the estimated 1 million people (almost 20 percent of the state's population) who seek dental treatment through the state's medical assistance programs annually.

95 percent of Wisconsin's dentists are small business owners who refuse to impose a "hidden tax" on private-pay patients by cost-shifting losses from participation in an inadequately-funded MA program. Low-income patients suffer for various reasons: failure to care for their own oral health; inability to find a dental office for routine care, because small businesses can't absorb too much income loss; and lawmakers' failure to sufficiently fund the dental care they promise.

Dental access improves in states with fair-market rates. The WDA supports increasing dental MA reimbursements to the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the most recent ADA fee survey for this region.

**The WDA appreciates the efforts of legislators who work to improve dental access for low-income patients by prioritizing a financial investment by state and federal governments. We welcome the opportunity to partner with the state in implementing a long-term, viable solution that takes advantage of the more than 2,000 private dental practices across Wisconsin already "open for business".**