



## 2008 – Media Talking Points



Give Kids A Smile national children's dental access day was launched in February (National Children's Dental Health Month) 2003 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. **Wisconsin GKAS events have provided some \$2.1 million in donated dental care to 12,500 low-income children since the program was introduced.**

### GKAS '08 FACTS

- 318 dentists and 760 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 \$763,000 in oral hygiene education and dental care will be donated to 5,433 needy children.
- Nationwide, 51,000 dental professionals will provide services to 500,000 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 recommends children see a dentist within six months of their first tooth erupting or by age one. 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 six to eight 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. More commonly, moderate tooth decay restricts children's daily activities and results in the loss of many millions of hours of classroom time each year.

### 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 spend *less than one percent*, or \$38 million of a \$4.4 billion annual Medicaid budget, on oral health programs for children *and* adults.
- Four out of five states spend a higher percentage of MA dollars on dental care for children and adults than does Wisconsin.
- Volunteer data collection shows individual WDA dentists donate, on average, \$10,000 - \$12,000 worth of care annually through their private practices, in addition to free services they provide through GKAS, MA, Donated Dental Services, community clinics and other charitable programs.

### Charitable care cannot fulfill the oral health care needs of the estimated 864,000 people who seek dental treatment through the state's MA program 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.
- MA patients experience a lack of access, because dentists either limit their participation or refuse to participate in the state's under-funded program.
- 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 working to improve dental access for low-income patients with 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.'**