

# WATCH YOUR MOUTH

## Oral Health in the Commonwealth: Charting a Course for Change

Common-sense solutions to common challenges define much of Massachusetts' history. Basic social institutions like public education and our subway system exist because a group of Bay Staters worked together to strengthen our community. This month, more than 200 residents from across the state joined together at the Better Oral Health for Massachusetts summit to address one of the most widespread health issues facing our communities today: dental disease. Representing teachers, school nurses, community members, physicians, business people, religious leaders, the dental community, and others, all parties have committed to working together to create a plan for a system of care that reaches everyone in our state to ensure optimal oral health through the lifespan.

Dental decay is the most common, chronic childhood disease. It is five times more common than asthma, and affects nearly half of all third graders. Caused by a bacterial infection in the mouth, dental decay can interfere with the most basic functions, such as eating, talking and sleeping. Nationally, 51 million school hours are lost each year due to dental related absence. These lost school hours mean lost opportunities for our children. Kids with dental disease often reach adulthood with the disease, where the health consequences become even more serious. Dental disease is associated with stroke, diabetes, and lung disease.

Fortunately, when communities work together to establish systems of preventive care, health professionals can intervene before the disease develops. Oral health is a critical component of overall health and of our communities' futures. An Oral Health Plan for Massachusetts will help to guide us toward improved oral and overall health. Led by the state's Department of Public Health and also sponsored by the Massachusetts Dental Society, Massachusetts Dental Hygienists' Association, and Delta Dental of Massachusetts, this plan will become the road map needed to chart a course to community change.

Together, we can prevent dental disease. Join us in speaking up for the oral health of Massachusetts.

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**[www.WatchYourMouth.org](http://www.WatchYourMouth.org)**  
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