



## Oral Health Focus 2020

### INTRODUCTION

In 2008 the New Mexico Dental Association introduced the “Brighter Smiles New Mexico” campaign as a means to draw attention to barriers that prevent many New Mexicans from having access to the dental care they need. That campaign was never meant to be a comprehensive plan, but did serve as an effective tool to highlight key representative issues. Despite the fact that none of the Brighter Smiles goals was fully realized, it has served as a focus for Dental Association activities and touchstone for communications efforts. After five years, the mixed results suggest that a new campaign is appropriate, which builds on both those original Brighter Smiles concepts and more broadly incorporates other policy issues that have been a regular part of NMDA activities. While the emphasis of Brighter Smiles campaign focused on communications, the new campaign will from the outset identify concrete and specific policy, practice and funding objectives with the goal of improving the oral health and access to dental care of all New Mexicans by the year 2020. Oral Health Focus 2020 will serve as both a roadmap and a timeline for Association activities to achieve success in a timely and reasonable way. It will act as a challenge to policy makers to make concrete progress toward addressing important issues to improve access to dental care.

This presentation will provide background and reasoning for the campaign as it is initiated. Many of the issues that affect access are deeply rooted in our cultures and society and not easily overcome. There are not simple solutions. Realistically, when 2020 arrives in just seven years, some goals may need to be revised, but incremental progress beginning in year one is the only way to achieve comprehensive success. Ultimately, the health and well-being of many people are dependent upon that success. As professionals, dentists make a commitment not only to the care of their own patients, but to take responsibility for the health of their communities. This initiative is a cooperative effort by New Mexico’s dentists to improve access to dental care in New Mexico.

Oral Health Focus 2020 consists of twelve general recommendations in four categories. Each recommendation is further broken into prioritized steps to allow incremental development and gauge progress. While some recommendations will require institutional investment at the outset, taken as a whole the savings in the long-term, both for individuals and the state, could be considerable. Too often, the political will to undertake a project of this scope wanes as economies fluctuate and administrations change. Dental Health Focus 2020 charts a non-partisan course to advance the goals as the environment changes.

## **PREVENTION & PUBLIC HEALTH**

**Focus # 1:** Implement a statewide incentive program for community water fluoridation.

**Focus #2:** Establish a qualified dentist as New Mexico State Dental Director and empower him or her to create an effective preventive dental public health program

**Focus #3:** Establish a requirement that children have a documented dentist's examination prior to enrolling in school in New Mexico.

## **EFFECTIVE FUNDING**

**Focus #4:** Reform and expand Medicaid to streamline claim submission, provide improved benefits for adults and seniors, and reimburse at reasonable market-justified rates.

**Focus #5:** Establish a dental benefits "bill-of-rights" to assure that patients may see the dentist they choose without inappropriate coercion or penalties.

**Focus #6:** Remove gross receipts tax from all non-elective health care services

## **EDUCATION**

**Focus #7:** Fund grants for all students accepted into dental schools through WICHE or contract equivalents

**Focus #8:** Establish a BA/DDS program to recruit, nurture and support NM students through dental school and encourage diversity.

**Focus #9:** Construct public health infrastructure to recruit faculty and support clinical externships during transition from out-of-state to in-state dental school.

## **PRACTICE AND WORKFORCE**

**Focus #10:** Initiate or expand existing loan repayment or scholarship programs for up to the entire cost of dental school in exchange for practice in highly underserved areas.

**Focus #11:** Utilize a demonstration project in cooperation with underserved NM communities to investigate the use expanded function dental "mid-levels" of various models to facilitate care.

**Focus #12:** Establish Community Dental Health Coordinator training programs in conjunction with at least one accredited dental assisting and one dental hygiene program.