

Oral Health Literacy & Awareness Act

- ❖ Please urge your Senators and your Representative to cosponsor the Oral Health Literacy & Awareness Act when it is introduced.
- ❖ This legislation would authorize \$750,000 per year over a five-year period for the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to establish an evidence-based education campaign to promote oral health literacy among vulnerable populations.
- ❖ This legislation is pending re-introduction in the House and Senate.

Background

Oral health literacy (OHL) is defined as the individual capacity to understand and use dental information to transform oral health behaviors and is critical to increasing utilization of the oral health care system and improving health outcomes.

According to surveys conducted by the Department of Health and Human Services, less than half of the U.S. population uses the oral health care system as recommended, resulting in the development of serious preventable diseases such as tooth decay, periodontal disease, and oral cancer. Untreated dental disease can lead to chronic pain, disfigurement, and death, and contributes to the progression of other diseases including diabetes, heart disease, and Alzheimer's. On average, over 34 million school hours and more than \$45 billion in productivity are lost annually due to dental emergencies requiring unplanned care.

While HRSA has begun undertaking certain efforts in this area, more can be done through a Congressionally authorized program. Enacting the Oral Health Literacy & Awareness Act would provide HRSA with the dedicated funding necessary to bolster its novel and critical OHL campaign.

Oral Health Literacy & Awareness Act

The Oral Health Literacy & Awareness Act would establish a public health education campaign across existing HRSA programs to promote OHL. The campaign would:

- Communicate directly with specific populations, including children, pregnant women, parents, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and ethnic and racial minorities in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner;
- Use evidence-based strategies to promote oral health education, including education on the prevention of oral disease and early childhood caries, periodontal disease, and oral cancer among the medically vulnerable; and
- Operate across existing agency programs including the health center program, oral health workforce programs, maternal and child health programs, and rural health programs.

This legislation would provide medically vulnerable patients with the tools necessary to seek out regular dental care and prevent the development of serious disease.

Who is the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD)?

Founded in 1952, the AGD has over 40,000 members from across the United States and is the only professional association that exclusively represents the needs and interests of general dentists. As the country's second-largest dental association, AGD works to promote oral health to the public and foster general dentists' continued proficiency through quality continuing education.

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