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Dentists in Demand But Shortage Leaves Large Gap ***New report shows dentist shortage and hygienist over-supply to grow over the next decade***

Columbus, OH—Today, a statewide coalition of providers, consumers, and health care advocates, highlighted new numbers showing an increase in demand for dental care. The coalition, Dental Access Now!, released data from Health Resources and Services Administration showing demand for services compared to the supply of dental workforce over the next decade.

“When it comes to dental care, particularly for low-income and rural Ohioans, we have been falling behind,” said David Maywhoor, project director of Dental Access Now!. “Unfortunately, we will see the shortage of dentists grow over the next decade, making access to dental care for underserved communities even more difficult.”

The report’s key findings regarding dentists include:

- All 50 states are projected to see their dentist supply be outpaced by demand between 2012 and 2025.
- Nationally, the demand for dental care services is projected to grow. Although the supply of the oral health workforce is also expected to grow, the growth in supply of dentists in 2025 will be smaller than that of demand, leading to significant unmet needs.
- In Ohio, we need at least 235 more dentists to meet the needs of Ohioans today.
- **Unlike the national trend, Ohio’s projected supply of dentists will decrease by 2025.** In 2012, Ohio had 6,260 dentists. By 2025 the number of dentists in our state is projected to be just 5,887. Ohio will be “short” 627 dentists to meet the demand in 2025.

“The supply and demand data for Ohio shows that we must address the workforce shortage issues now before the problem gets worse over the next decade,” said Dr. Barry Gibberman, a dentist in private practice in Cincinnati. “There is an economic impact when dental care is not available. Dental problems are among the highest number of expensive and avoidable visits to hospital emergency rooms. Untreated dental issues lead to lost work hours and missed school days. People with poor oral health might have difficulty finding employment.”

The report also estimated the dental hygienist workforce. The report found that unlike dentists, the supply of hygienists is keeping up with demand. Nationally, it is projected that by 2025, that there will more hygienists than the need. In Ohio, demand will increase slightly for hygienists, and there is projected to be a larger growth in supply, leaving approximately 821 more hygienists than demand.

“Dental hygienists focus on prevention and have, for many years, championed the cause of dental care for the underserved. It is ironic to think of an ‘over supply’ of hygienists when so many Ohioans need basic preventive and restorative care,” said Meagan Niezgodski, a hygienist in Columbus. “Current laws place unnecessary restrictions on hygienists. Freeing up hygienists to work in communities can use the existing workforce to provide much needed preventive services to communities that lack access to care.”

The coalition is advocating for a workforce model that will allow for mid-level providers called dental therapists. A dental therapist is a mid-level provider who is rigorously trained in preventive and routine dental care. Working under a dentist’s supervision, dental therapists expand the reach of the dental care team, providing routine services, including fillings, non-surgical extractions and preventive care. In addition to establishing a new provider, the model allows for additional education opportunities for hygienists to be able to perform their traditional scope of preventive services as well as the restorative services of a dental therapist.

“The good news is we have a workforce model that can improve access to care,” said Gibberman “Our lawmakers should approve the use mid-level dental providers, similar to physician assistants and nurse practitioners, to perform routine care. It’s a safe, cost-effective solution to Ohio’s dental care crisis and will bring much needed care to low-income, rural, and other underserved communities.”

A copy of the report can be found at

<http://bhw.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/supplydemand/dentistry/nationalstatelevelprojectionsdentists.pdf>.

Dental Access Now! is a statewide coalition working to bring quality dental care to every community. It is a project of UHCAN Ohio.

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