

**TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

**UPDATE ON ORAL HEALTH SERVICES**

**Presented to  
Governor Bill Haslam  
and  
Tennessee Dental Association**

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## I.

### INTRODUCTION

This report is provided in response to Tennessee Code Annotated 68-1-303(b), which requires the Commissioner of Health, to provide an annual report to the Governor and the Tennessee State Dental Association (TDA) on the work done by and under the Commissioner in regards to distribution of literature throughout the state regarding the proper way to care for the teeth.

The mission of the Department of Health is to protect, promote, and improve the health and prosperity of persons living in, working in, or visiting the State of Tennessee. In advancement of this goal, the Department's Oral Health Services Section (OHS) operates on the fundamental principles of preventing and controlling oral diseases through organized community efforts. Statewide school-based dental programs have been expanded to offer high-risk populations preventive services to include sealants, oral health education, screenings to identify children with unmet dental needs, referrals for these children, and follow-up on those children with urgent needs. Comprehensive dental services for children and emergency dental care to adults, unable to access care in the private system, are provided in fixed facilities located in rural health departments statewide. In an effort to improve access to dental services for high risk children in underserved areas, the Tennessee Department of Health operates 3 mobile dental clinics. These mobile clinics are providing comprehensive dental services at school sites.

## II.

### ORAL HEALTH

#### A. Oral Disease Prevention

##### *Fluoride Varnish Initiative*

Tennessee Code Annotated 63-5-109(14) allows registered nurses and nurse practitioners to apply fluoride varnish to at risk underserved persons in public health clinics.

The Oral Health Services Section continues to conduct programs such as **Cavity Free in Tennessee**. This program targets children 0-5 years of age being seen in health department medical clinics for preventive dental services. Nursing staff screen these children and refer them to dental providers in addition to applying fluoride varnish twice yearly.

During Fiscal Year 2011, 18,551 at risk children have been screened, referred, and had fluoride varnish applied by nursing staff in Tennessee Department of Health medical clinics.

## **B. Dental Services**

### *1. Public Health Dental Clinical Facilities*

The Department of Health offers comprehensive dental services to children and emergency care to adults on a sliding fee scale basis according to income. Dental services are available at 55 local health department clinics located in 54 rural counties across the state. Dental services are typically offered 1 to 5 days per week. During the Fiscal Year 2011, 17,595 children made 28,274 visits to Department of Health rural dental clinics and 5,691 adults made 8,168 visits. In total during Fiscal Year 2011, more than 23,200 individuals made more than 36,400 patient visits to Department of Health rural dental clinics.

### *2. School-Based Dental Prevention Project (SBDPP)*

This program is a statewide comprehensive preventive program involving dental screenings, referrals and follow-up for dental care, oral hygiene education, and sealants. SBDPP targets children in grades K-8 in schools with 50% or more free and reduced lunch programs. During Fiscal Year 2011, more than 131,000 children received dental screenings and more than 240,000 sealants were placed on approximately 44,000 children in 324 schools.

### *3. Mobile Dental Clinics*

In an effort to improve access to dental services for high risk children in underserved areas, the Oral Health Services Section conducts a mobile dental program. Three mobile dental clinics are located in east, central, and west Tennessee. These clinics offer comprehensive care to low-income children at school sites. During Fiscal Year 2011, a total of 108 children received 1675 dental services.

### *4. Dental Funding Initiatives*

In Fiscal Year 2011, the Department awarded 16 grants for emergency dental services for adults and under these grants 18,778 extractions were performed.

### *5. Distribution of Information*

The Department of Health's website includes an Oral Health Services site that provides a broad range of information to public health professionals, parents, community leaders, and the general public. The web site address for Oral Health Services is <http://health.state.tn.us/oralhealth/index.html>.

Staff in all of the Department's dental programs, distribute literature and educational information to individuals served. This information addresses a wide variety of preventive dental topics such as the importance of oral health and proper oral hygiene techniques. Requests for oral health information from agencies and the public are addressed by staff at the local, regional and Central Office level.

