



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Governor's Task Force Unveils Plan
to Improve Oral Health of Oklahoma Children**

Oklahoma City – Despite legislative support and funding, significant disparities remain in oral healthcare among Oklahoma children of low-income, uninsured and minority families and those with special healthcare needs and their peers, according to the State Oral Health Plan unveiled Nov. 13 by the Governor's Task Force on Children and Oral Health.

The plan is a comprehensive study with specific recommendations commissioned by Gov. Brad Henry on the issue of children's oral health statewide.

“The recommendations detailed in the State Oral Health Plan are first steps toward creating better oral healthcare for all Oklahoma children,” said Lynn Means, executive director of the Oklahoma Dental Association (ODA), one of 13 state agencies tasked with developing the plan.

Gov. Henry appointed the Governor's Task Force on Children and Oral Health in 2007 to extensively study the issue of children's oral health in Oklahoma. The Task Force was asked to address dental programs for children and youth, including those with special needs; study existing state, federal and private sector-funded programs; determine ways to infuse oral health education, dental care and dental disease prevention into existing programs; make recommendations for new programs; and develop a State Oral Health Plan.

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“Good oral health is essential to a healthy lifestyle, and it is critical that all Oklahomans, particularly children, have access to high-quality, affordable dental care. I want to thank all Task Force members for their good work on this very important issue,” said Gov. Henry.

With grant funding from the American Dental Association (ADA), the Governor’s Task Force assembled a team of private practice dental professionals and state agencies to examine the condition of oral healthcare in Oklahoma. The Task Force then developed the State Oral Health Plan and its recommendations on a range of issues affecting children, including community water fluoridation, the shortage of dental professionals in rural parts of the state, and barriers to care for populations most in need of oral healthcare services.

The Task Force has asked Gov. Henry to establish an ongoing committee that will ensure the plan’s recommendations are carried out by the appropriate parties, according to Task Force Chairman Richard Haught, D.D.S.

“Some of the tactics suggested by the Task Force in this plan should be utilized in the short term, while others may require a longer-term approach, including potential legislative or policy changes,” Haught said.

The complete Oklahoma Oral Health Plan can be viewed at www.okda.org after 12 p.m.

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About the Oklahoma Dental Association

Founded in 1907, the Oklahoma Dental Association (ODA) has more than 1,500 dentist members and is headquartered in Oklahoma City. The ODA was established to help foster an awareness of the obligations and responsibilities of the dental profession to society, to help advance the art and science of dentistry, and to promote public health and health services in Oklahoma. Visit www.okda.org for more information.

About the American Dental Association

The American Dental Association (ADA) is the nation’s largest dental association, representing more than 155,000 member dentists. An authority on public oral health and the dental profession since 1859, the ADA is committed to science and professional advancement, oral health advocacy, education, research and the development of dental standards. Visit www.ada.org for more information.