



## **Citizens' Watch for Oral Health**

### **Working To Protect and Promote Oral Health**

- The goal of Citizens' Watch for Oral Health is to create a constituency for oral health and build a supportive climate for policy proposals. In order to benefit large numbers of people with long-term sustainable solutions, it is necessary to shape public policies that will change, improve or create systems to improve oral health.
- To influence policy, oral health must be: elevated in the minds of the public, key interest groups, policymakers and elected officials; identified as an important concern by a variety of diverse organizations; and reframed as a community responsibility, not just a personal responsibility.
- Public opinion research shows that the general public has little awareness of the seriousness of oral disease. But, when presented with information about the prevalence and consequences of oral disease, the public prioritizes it as an important health need that should be addressed.
- To achieve our public policy goals, Citizens' Watch includes a coalition, utilizes earned and paid media, develops an annual public policy agenda and is actively involved with state policymakers.
  - Citizens' Watch for Oral Health Coalition is a broad-based constituency promoting oral health. The coalition includes business, labor, medical, health and dental organizations, and child and senior advocacy groups.
  - Paid and Earned Media: Citizens' Watch has increased the profile of oral health as an important health issue and shifted the public dialogue from recognizing a problem to identifying solutions. Millions of people have been exposed to the message that oral health is an important part of overall health. Since 2001, more than 43 opinion pieces and editorials, and many more articles have appeared in media across Washington state reinforcing the importance of oral health and identifying key policy solutions. Citizens' Watch partners with leading health and advocacy organizations on its paid television and radio campaigns and earned media to engage them in the issue and further build credibility with their constituencies.
  - Public Policy Results: Since 2001, WDS Foundation has taken the lead on several policy successes including:
    - Expanding reimbursement to primary care medical providers for delivering dental disease prevention services to young Medicaid-eligible children
    - Defeating anti-fluoridation legislation
    - Protecting funding for Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD) programs
    - Seniors Dental Access pilot: obtained legislative funding for launching a 3-year pilot effort to expand access to care for older adults.

For more information, visit the campaign's web site at [www.oralhealthwatch.org](http://www.oralhealthwatch.org) or call Tara Lee at (206) 528-7327.