



Washington Dental Service Foundation

Eliminating Oral Disease and Improving Overall Health for All

Promoting **early intervention** and **prevention**

Improving **access** to care

Advocating for **effective public policies**

 **DELTA DENTAL**
**Washington Dental Service
Foundation**

Community Advocates for Oral Health



▲ Emma's medications caused dry mouth, a condition that led to painful tooth decay and costly dental care.

A Problem That Can Be Prevented

For young and old, good oral health is an important part of good overall health.

Healthy teeth help a child eat properly, speak clearly and guide adult teeth into place. Yet tooth decay is the most common chronic disease of childhood. **By third grade, nearly six out of ten children in Washington State suffer from tooth decay—a statistic higher than the national average.**

Good oral health helps seniors get proper nutrition, maintain good overall health and enjoy a better quality of life. Many factors put older adults at risk for poor oral health, including medications and health conditions that cause “dry mouth” which can quickly lead to cavities. **One in four seniors has severe gum disease, a condition linked to other serious chronic health disorders, including diabetes, heart disease and stroke.** Because older adults are more likely to experience a chronic health condition, maintaining good oral health becomes even more important with age.

Oral disease is widespread, yet preventable. **Preventing dental disease avoids needless pain and suffering and saves money for families, businesses and taxpayers.**



▲ By Ryan's third birthday, he already had more than a dozen cavities. The majority of children in low-income families in Washington State do not receive dental care. Untreated cavities can be painful and affect a child's ability to learn and live a healthy, happy life.

Washington Dental Service Foundation

We're passionate about preventing oral disease.

Washington Dental Service Foundation—a non-profit funded by Washington Dental Service, the leading dental benefits company in Washington State—is dedicated to significant, long-lasting improvements in the oral health, and overall health, of Washington's young children and seniors. **The Foundation works with partners to develop and execute innovative solutions that provide lasting benefits to our state's residents.**

Washington Dental Service Foundation focuses on young children and seniors, two groups especially vulnerable to oral disease.

Young children: Early intervention is important

Keeping kids cavity-free helps them thrive and improves their oral health for a lifetime. Most dental decay can be prevented through a combination of simple measures: early screenings, community water

fluoridation, education about personal care, healthy eating habits and preventive treatments including fluoride varnish. It is important to start early. When pregnant women have good oral health, their infants will have better oral health. Foundation initiatives improve dental access and treatment for low-income families by engaging the dental and medical communities and partnering with community health centers.

Seniors: Preventing oral disease improves health

Maintaining good oral health is an essential part of healthy aging. Good oral health helps seniors eat well and avoid the unnecessary pain and expense of tooth decay and gum disease. Medical providers, caregivers, pharmacists and others who work with seniors can help identify those at risk for oral disease. They can provide education and preventive services like fluoride varnish and refer seniors to dental providers for treatment.

- ▼ The Foundation promotes healthy aging by encouraging pharmacists and medical providers to address the link between oral disease and overall health with older adults.



- ◀ With its partners, the Foundation advocates for effective oral health policies that will create lasting improvements in the way services are delivered and financed.



- ◀ The SmileMobile travels around the state, providing dental care and oral health education to children who have limited resources for care.

Foundation initiatives promote coordinated care between dental and medical professionals and expand access to low-cost dental services for seniors. To reach a large number of seniors, the Foundation also partners with community-based agencies, such as Area Agencies on Aging and senior centers.

Advocating for effective oral health policies

The Foundation works to create an environment where policy proposals to improve children's and seniors' oral health are understood and supported by policymakers and the public. Funding for oral health programs in Washington State is less likely to shrink, and effective policies are more likely to be adopted, when there is a constituency advocating for oral health. Through a broad-based coalition and a range of campaign activities, the Foundation is drawing attention to the prevalence of oral disease, its consequences and the need for policy solutions.

- ▶ The Foundation provides funding and assistance to ABCD (Access to Baby and Child Dentistry) programs around the state. Dr. Melissa Ramsey, an ABCD dentist in Walla Walla, is committed to removing barriers and providing oral health services to children who depend on the Medicaid program for their care.



- ▲ The Foundation works with medical providers to deliver preventive oral health services during well-child checkups. Dr. Carl Lindgren, an Olympia pediatrician, talks to parents to make sure that their children develop good oral health habits.



- ▲ The Foundation develops and delivers oral health education for preschool children through a curriculum called Cavity Free Kids. With early learning community partners, the Foundation works to ensure that oral health education is delivered to children and their families and that childcare providers have the skills to identify at-risk children and connect them to care.

Washington Dental Service Foundation is changing the way people think about oral health.

Good oral health means better overall health.

Why care about oral health?

Oral disease is costly, painful and debilitating — and it's widespread in Washington.

Seniors with oral disease often don't get proper nutrition, which affects their overall health.

Dental decay is the most common chronic disease of childhood and often starts in early childhood.

Dental disease is linked to other serious health problems, including diabetes.

Oral disease is preventable.

Children with dental pain can't learn, play or chew.

What can you do?

Policy-makers – Understand the importance of oral health and its connection to overall health when making public policy decisions.

Dental professionals – Promote early screening to prevent decay and participate in the Access to Baby and Child Dentistry Program. For more information, go to www.abcd-dental.org.

Primary care medical providers – Deliver oral health education and screenings during well-child checkups. For information about in-office training, go to kidsoralhealth.org.

Early learning educators – Share oral health tips regularly with families to establish good oral care and healthy eating habits early in a child's life.

Seniors' advocates and families – Promote oral health access and education for seniors who are at risk for oral disease.

Parents – Make sure that all children have their teeth screened by a dentist or physician by age one.

Communities – Support community water fluoridation.

Our mission:

**Washington Dental
Service Foundation —
eliminating oral disease
in order to improve
overall health for all.**



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Foundation**

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Washington Dental Service Foundation
9706 Fourth Avenue NE
Seattle, WA 98115-2157

(206) 528-2337
foundation@deltadentalwa.com
www.deltadentalwa.com