



## **CALIFORNIA DENTAL ASSOCIATION RESPONSE TO FAILURE OF BALLOT MEASURES**

**May 20, 2009** -- The California Dental Association was deeply disappointed by the failure of yesterday's ballot measures that would have provided a modest revenue stream to fund among other programs those designed to serve the oral health care needs of our most vulnerable citizens.

Over the past seven years, CDA has supported reductions in the Denti-Cal program in an effort to keep it available to those Californians that depend on it. CDA will continue to advocate on behalf of the public and is committed to working with legislators and the Schwarzenegger administration to ensure that despite the elimination of the adult Denti-Cal program, its former beneficiaries will be able to at the very least receive basic restorative services rather than to have tooth extraction as the only option available to treat a decaying tooth.

"In these very difficult economic times and with the elimination of adult dental services, it is ironic that Medi-Cal will allow basic tooth extraction at a cost of \$41 yet deny a simple filling at the cost of only \$39. It is obviously 'penny-wise and pound-foolish' to provide these patients with no other option than an eventual tooth extraction when a basic filling would keep a tooth healthy and cost less," said Carol Summerhays, DDS, CDA's president.

Earlier this year, the Legislature and governor chose to eliminate dental services for adults from the state's Medi-Cal program. This action will obviously leave tens of thousands of Californians without access to basic dental care and drive those with dental problems directly into already overcrowded emergency rooms that are clearly ill-equipped and ill-staffed to provide any dental services. Those patients will be treated for infection, perhaps provided with pain medication, and told to find a dentist to treat their problem. It is estimated that treatment of dental problems in an emergency room setting costs 10 times more than treatment in a dental office.

According to the California Healthcare Foundation, "On average, California emergency departments log more than 80,000 visits a year for preventable dental conditions. Left untreated, cavities and other routine dental problems can develop into serious infections that require immediate treatment, exacting a high cost both on patients and the health care system."

Moreover, many community clinics rely on dental services for a large portion of their funding. With the elimination of adult dental services, it is expected that many of these clinics will not be able to remain financially viable. Dental school clinics that serve a large number of adult Denti-Cal recipients will also be placed under severe economic constraints by the elimination of the adult dental program. The lack of patients in these clinics will also have a significant negative impact on how dentists are educated and trained in California.

Unfortunately, once a program of this nature is eliminated, it is very difficult to resurrect. In 2004, the state of Michigan eliminated their adult dental services to save approximately \$20 million, only to bring the program back in 2006 because of the cost pressures of not having an adult dental program was placing on the state's health care safety net. When the program re-started, one-third fewer dentists were able to participate in the program.

"Physicians and dentists have known for decades that there is a direct connection between oral and systemic health. Good oral health is intrinsically linked to good general health and is essential to the well-being of all individuals. Tooth decay is an infectious and transmittable bacterial disease that manifests itself in the mouth. Other than its location in the mouth, tooth decay is no different from any other disease or infection caused by bacteria anywhere in the human body," said Summerhays.