

Connecticut's 'A' In Access To Dental Care Just The Beginning

Connecticut is one of only seven U.S. states that ranked an "A" in a study conducted by The Pew Center on the States, a division of The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The study on "The State of Children's Dental Health: Making Coverage Matter" graded 50 states on eight key benchmarks to determine access to care and is a follow-up to one conducted last year. Connecticut met six* of the eight policy benchmarks for strengthening children's dental health and has made advances on the other two:

- new type of primary-care provider authorized; and
- sealant program in at least 25% of high-risk schools.

Douglas B. Keck, D.M.D., M.S.H.Ed., a participating pediatric Delta Dental dentist based in Madison, Connecticut, provided perspective on the study. He noted that as the result of a landmark lawsuit, dental-related fees for treating children increased and many of the access-to-care barriers inherent in the Medicaid system were minimized.

"Since that time, the number of providers willing to see Medicaid enrollees has gone from 300 to 1,300 dentists, and the utilization rate has increased to 47%," said Dr. Keck. "This is proof that providing reimbursement rates nearing those in the private sector, as well as decreasing the barriers to dental care—such as transportation, translation and education services, and paperwork—does provide better access."

As far as sealant programs, Dr. Keck also noted that for the past two years, the Connecticut State Dental Association has been working on

developing a stronger school-based dental initiative to educate children about the need for good oral health care.

Yet even in this high-ranking state, there is more work to do. "We have children who have dental coverage, through private insurance, Medicaid, or the Children's Health Insurance Program. But they are not getting to the dentist," said Dr. Keck. "We need to increase our utilization rates for children's dental services."

Connecticut's lack of utilization of dental services is not unusual in the U.S. as a whole, even though tens of millions of children throughout the country have dental coverage. "Providing children with a dental home will help to decrease dental treatment in the emergency room setting," said Scott Navarro, D.D.S., vice president of Delta Dental of New Jersey. "We can work together—dentists, parents, educators, school nurses, and other interested parties—to help create true access to care. The Delta Dental Plans

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Association and its member companies are proud to partner within our communities to educate about the importance of dental health.

Together, we can ensure that children get a dental home and a life-long commitment toward good oral health."

Last year, Delta Dental companies donated more than \$45 million throughout the country to support programs that are focusing on preventing dental disease, expanding access to care, advancing dental science, and understanding the connections between oral and overall health.

Dr. Keck underscored the importance of the collaboration between a state and multiple stakeholders involved in providing oral health care. He also noted: "Delta Dental is one of those sources, and Connecticut appreciates the numerous ways that the Delta Dental Foundation has helped us achieve our goals."

**Connecticut met the criteria for these six policy benchmarks in the Pew study: hygienists in school-based programs placing sealants, optimally fluoridated water provided to 75% of residents served by community water systems, dental services being received by 38.1% of Medicaid-enrolled children, dentists paid 60.5% of dentists' median retail fees through Medicaid, medical providers reimbursed for preventive dental services, and basic screening data submitted to the national database.*