



MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

Oral Health Public Awareness Campaign

A.8365 (Woerner)/S.8348 (Brouk)

April 26, 2024

The Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) supports A.8365 (Woerner)/S.8348 (Brouk) to establish a campaign to promote public awareness of the causes of oral disease and its prevention.

The Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) is the statewide primary care association representing all federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), also known as community health centers (CHCs). CHCs serve more than 2.3 million New Yorkers at over 800 sites each year in health provider shortage areas (HPSAs) and disproportionately feel the strain of the health worker crisis due to a multitude of factors, including difficulty in competing for providers, rising operating costs, and financial challenges. CHCs serve populations that, historically, have been failed by the traditional health care system: 89% live below 200% of the Federal poverty level, 68% are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC), 28% speak limited or no English, 12% are uninsured, more than 4% are unhoused, and 68% are enrolled in Medicaid, CHIP, or are dually enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid.

Dissemination of important oral health information and how to practice good oral hygiene will not only lead to better oral health outcomes but will also positively impact quality of life. Large scale primary prevention public health campaigns are effective, and examples include promoting childhood vaccines, breast cancer screenings, child nutrition and maternal health, etc. By increasing oral health literacy to the public through a promotional campaign, New Yorkers will come to understand the benefits of prevention, early detection, and management of dental disease. This is crucial given that many undiagnosed and underdiagnosed dental conditions can impact future health outcomes leading to serious chronic disease such as heart disease. It is necessary to present accurate and concise information regarding the connections between poor oral health and its implications on overall health and well-being for all age groups for individuals or their caretakers to make informed healthcare decisions.

Increasing oral health literacy is vital given the current dental workforce shortages and difficulties in accessing dental providers with long waiting lists. An estimated 9 million New Yorkers, or half the state's population, are enrolled in a public health plan and an estimated 1.2 million residents are uninsured.¹ Just 19% of dentists in New York participate in Medicaid.² CHCs are often the only source of affordable and accessible dental care in underserved communities. The serious lack of attainable oral care for all New Yorkers, but especially those in medically underserved communities, necessitates a full oral health campaign to increase positive oral health outcomes.

Recognizing the crucial significance of oral health, CHCANYS urges the New York State Legislature to pass A.8365 (Woerner)/S.8348 (Brouk) to institute a public oral health campaign. This initiative emphasizes that fostering good oral health begins with individual awareness and education.

For more information, contact Marie Mongeon, Vice President of Policy: mmongeon@chcanys.org.

¹ <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/health-insurance-coverage-in-new-york-state.pdf>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9274318/>