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## Michigan Dentists Giving Free Dental Care to Low-Income Children During Annual 'Give Kids a Smile' Program Starting February 1

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LANSING, Mich., Jan. 29 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- February is National Children's Dental Health Month and starting Friday, February 1, thousands of children throughout the state will receive free dental services ranging from dental fillings to oral health screenings to complete treatment. It's part of the American Dental Association's sixth annual "Give Kids a Smile" campaign where dentists donate their services to disadvantaged children who don't have access to dental care.

During last year's "Give Kids a Smile" events in Michigan, 329 Michigan Dental Association-member dentists, along with hygienists, assistants and volunteers provided dental care and oral health education to 37,310 children. It is estimated that over \$800,000 worth of dental care was provided to needy children.

"We realize there are thousands of disadvantaged children in Michigan who are not able to receive regular dental care," said Steve Dater, DDS, president of the Michigan Dental Association.

"While 'Give Kids a Smile' day will help some children get the dental care they desperately need, I worry about the thousands of children who aren't here today--the ones who continue to have trouble eating, sleeping and paying attention in school because their teeth hurt and are in such bad shape," said Dater.

"It's important to remember," according to Dater, "that a healthy body starts with a healthy mouth. Untreated dental disease is painful and can affect a child's physical, emotional and social development. Oral health must be considered part of primary care."

"A one-day event like Give Kids a Smile is not a cure-all, it's a wake-up call," said Dater. "Here in Michigan, one percent of the total Medicaid budget is allocated to dental services for both children and adults. Dentists want to be part of the solution, but we can't solve the access problem on our own." Michigan is fortunate to have the Healthy Kids Dental program that provides dental care to Medicaid-eligible children in 59 (with Genesee and Saginaw counties to be added later this year) of Michigan's 83 counties. As a result of Healthy Kids Dental more children are receiving necessary dental care and are beginning a pattern of routine preventive care. "Ultimately we would like to see Healthy Kids Dental available to children throughout the state," said Dater.

It is shocking that dental disease is the most common chronic childhood disease in this country, five times more common than asthma. Yet, dental disease is preventable through brushing, flossing, proper diet and nutrition, regular dental visits and access to fluoride and sealants.

According to Dater, prevention is the key to maintaining proper oral health. "We need to get serious about programs which provide preventive oral health services at an early age. Community water fluoridation, dental sealants and fluoride treatments are all important. These preventive programs provide an enormous return on a relatively small investment and must continue to be funded through the Michigan Department of Community Health's oral health division." Give Kids a Smile Events in Michigan

Hundreds of dentists throughout the state will be involved in events for "Give Kids a Smile." Events will range from dental fillings to oral health screenings to education programs and will take place in private dental offices, schools, large dental clinics, colleges and universities.

Families living in Detroit, Oakland and Macomb counties may dial 2-1-1 to inquire about the event at the University of Detroit Mercy.

For a list of events in your area and additional information on Give Kids a Smile, please visit <http://www.smilemichigan.com/> and click on "Public."

Headquartered in Lansing, the Michigan Dental Association has more than 5,800 members in 26 local dental societies and two dental schools. Since its founding in 1856, the MDA has sought to educate the public, enhance its members' ability

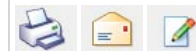
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