



Minnesota Department of **Human Services**

News



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Minnesota improves state grade for children's dental health

Minnesota has jumped from a C to an A in its efforts to ensure dental health and provide access to dental care for children, according to a report issued Tuesday by the Pew Center on the States.

"This improvement is good news for Minnesota children," said Dr. Ed Ehlinger, Minnesota commissioner of Health. "Ensuring good oral health for children is just as important as ensuring good physical and mental health."

The report uses an A-F scale to grade states on how well they are employing eight proven policy solutions or benchmarks. Minnesota is one of seven states to receive an A for meeting six or more of the benchmarks. In the first report, issued last year Minnesota received a C.

The two policy benchmarks that Minnesota improved on are the number of Medicaid enrolled children getting dental care and statewide efforts to collect data on children's oral health status using the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors Basic Screening Survey.

"Dental insurance does not always translate into actual dental care, especially for low-income children," said Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson. "We are delighted to see significant improvement in the numbers of children receiving dental care."

The number of Medicaid eligible children receiving a dental service increased four percentage points from 2007 to 2009 to 42.1 percent. While this is a positive step, according to Jesson, whose agency oversees the state Medicaid program, further improvement is needed to reach the national average of 58 percent for children with private insurance. Continued collaborative work between the state and other key organizations including the Minnesota Dental Hygienists' Association and the Minnesota Dental Association, will be critical to continued progress, Jesson stated.

To meet the data tracking benchmark, the Minnesota Department of Health Oral Disease Prevention Program partnered in 2010 with the Minnesota Physical Activity and Nutrition Program and several volunteer dental hygienists to collect and submit data on oral health indicators for more than 2,000 Minnesota third-graders.

The state is also making other efforts to improve children's oral health. This year, two new levels of primary care dental providers created under 2009 legislation — dental therapists and advanced dental therapists — will enter the work force. In addition, school-based dental programs are being initiated and expanded to include dental sealants.

The Pew report is at http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewcenteronthestatesorg/Initiatives/Childrens_Dental_Health/048_11_DENT_50_State_Factsheets_Minnesota_052311_web.pdf