

July 7, 2008

Senator Barack Obama
Obama for America
233 N. Michigan Avenue
11th Floor
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear Senator Obama:

Americans rightly have identified health care as one of the most important domestic issues for policymakers to address. It has been a central issue in the presidential campaign. However, there are essentially no oral health care services covered under the nation's Medicare system, and no oral health care services are mandated for adults in the Medicaid program. In 2000, *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General* declared that oral disease is a "silent epidemic" and that good oral health is essential to overall health and well-being. Yet, today 130 million adults and children lack dental insurance coverage.

As a matter of principle, the American Dental Education Association (ADEA)¹ believes that every American should receive the care necessary to achieve good oral health. No viable solution for the current U.S. health care crisis can be accomplished without recognizing the critical importance of oral health. We strongly urge you to make certain that coverage and access to affordable oral health care services are integral components of your health care plan.

Most dental diseases are preventable, and early dental treatment has proven to be cost effective. In fact:

- Preventive dental care and early detection and treatment save \$4 billion annually in the United States.
- Children who receive preventive dental care early in life have lifetime dental costs that are 40 percent lower than children who do not receive this care.
- The cost of providing preventive dental treatment is estimated to be 10 times less than managing symptoms of dental disease in a hospital emergency room.

¹ The American Dental Education Association (ADEA) represents all 57 dental schools in the United States in addition to 714 dental residency training programs and 577 allied dental programs, as well as more than 12,000 faculty who educate and train the nearly 50,000 students and residents attending these institutions. Academic dental institutions are safety-net providers and serve as dental homes to hundreds of thousands of patients, many of whom are underserved low-income patients covered by Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

And each year, millions of productive work hours are lost due to dental diseases. Dental disease is also one of the leading causes of school absenteeism for children.

- Children miss 51 million hours of school annually due to dental problems.
- Workers lose 164 million work hours annually because of dental disease.
- According to the *Journal of Dental Education*, oral related illnesses account nationally for 3.6 million days of bed disability, 11.8 million days of restricted activity, and 1 million lost school days each year.

The most tragic example of untreated dental disease is the death in 2007 of 12-year-old Deamonte Driver of Maryland. Deamonte's death resulted from complications of an acute dental infection that spread to his brain - an infection that could have been avoided had Deamonte received proper preventive dental care. The cost of his hospitalization was estimated at \$250,000. Had he gotten treatment earlier, the cost would have been closer to \$80.

As the voice of dental education, the American Dental Education Association believes that dental educators have a professional obligation to promote access to oral health care. Academic dental institutions are vital public trusts and national resources. They educate the future dental workforce, conduct dental research, teach communities about good oral health, and as safety-net providers ensure access to oral health care services.

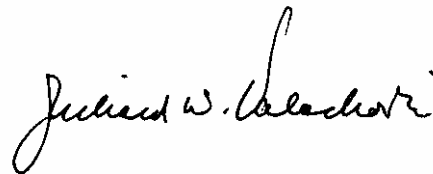
We hope you will join us in promoting oral health care for all Americans. As the presumptive Democratic Presidential nominee, you have the platform to educate the American public about the value and importance of good oral health. As President, you will have the power to ensure that any comprehensive reform of the U.S. health care system includes coverage and access to affordable oral health services.

Enclosed are ADEA's Principles and Policy Statement for Health Care Reform. For further information, please contact Jack Bresch, Associate Executive Director and Director of the ADEA Center for Public Policy and Advocacy, at 202-289-7201 or breschj@adea.org.

Sincerely,



Charles N. Bertolami, D.D.S., D.M.Sc.
President



Richard W. Valachovic, D.M.D., M.P.H.
Executive Director

Enclosure