

## CHILDREN SUFFER WHEN THERE ARE BARRIERS TO CARE

- In Cook County, there is just one clinic for every 15,700 uninsured children.
- In Cook County, 48 percent of third graders have experienced cavities and 27 percent have untreated cavities.
- In Chicago, 64 percent of third graders have experienced cavities and 36 percent have untreated cavities.
- Nationally, tooth decay accounts for 51 million hours of missed school each year. Dental disease among children from low income families is wide-spread across the nation. Eighty percent of children's tooth decay is found in just 25 percent of children.
- Nationally, about one out of four children rely on Medicaid for their health insurance coverage. Yet many children enrolled in Medicaid never see a dentist throughout the year.

## ACCESS TO CARE IN COOK COUNTY IS AMONG THE WORST IN ILLINOIS

- More than 1.4 million Cook County residents are registered for government health care; nearly half of the state's public aid population.
- It is estimated that one-third of Illinois' underserved population lives in Cook County, resulting in significant barriers to dental care for these residents.
- In areas where there are clinics, the average wait time for an appointment is two months for general care and often over a year for specialty care.
- Cook County dental clinics do not accept public aid patients.
- Illinois has one of the lowest reimbursement rates in the nation for Medicaid.



Founded in 2008 by Illinois State Dental Society and in partnership with the Chicago Dental Society, the Bridge to Healthy Smiles campaign is led by a diverse coalition of oral health care advocates and community groups committed to bridging the access to care gap for dental coverage in Illinois.

The Bridge to Healthy Smiles coalition spearheaded the passage of legislation that will begin to improve access to oral health care in Illinois. These accomplishments will lay the groundwork to aid in developing dental clinics in Cook County.



[www.bridgetohealthysmiles.com](http://www.bridgetohealthysmiles.com)

## Cook County Oral Health Crisis



*"After losing my job and health insurance I was in desperate need to find a dental clinic to treat my children. That's when I learned that Cook County Clinics don't take patients on public aid. That was the beginning of a frustrating and painful process."*

—Jamila Lawrence  
Chicago





*“The devastation that families face due to inadequate access to dental care has gone virtually undetected by most policymakers but the reality is that this is a silent epidemic that is becoming more critical every day.”*

*—Dr. Edward J Schaaf  
Community Health Clinic*

## OVERVIEW THE ORAL HEALTH CRISIS

Overwhelmed clinics force patients to wait for months and sometimes up to a year to obtain specialty dental care. Hardworking low and middle income families suffer every day because of access barriers to critically needed dental services. For many Cook County residents, public clinics remain the only option for care. Dental programs have been cut and clinics closed while the number of children and adults who rely on public dental care has increased. There are just four dental clinics operated by Cook County to treat the more than two million suburban residents and only one in the City of Chicago at Stroger Hospital. Because of high patient volume, clinics can only offer basic dental services. In fact, the clinic at Stroger Hospital only does adult extractions and the 35 available daily appointments fill up in just fifteen minutes.

Clinics are overwhelmed, forcing patients to wait for months and sometimes up to a year to obtain specialty dental care. In many cases, patients must revert to expensive emergency care, which is costly for taxpayers, painful and humiliating for the patient, and usually doesn't solve the long-term problem—it only masks it by treating infection and pain.

*“Barriers to accessing dental treatment are starting to impact middle class families. We are adding more patients to an already overwhelmed system, so until we address the oral health crisis, Cook County residents will continue to suffer.”*

*—Anne Clancy  
Chicago Community  
Oral Health Forum*

## ORAL HEALTH IMPACTS OVERALL HEALTH

There is an undeniable link between overall health and oral health. Studies show that poor oral health may be linked to heart disease, stroke, pre-term childbirth and oral cancer. A Surgeon General's report on oral health documented linkages between oral disease and ear and sinus infections, weakened immune systems, diabetes, heart and lung disease, as well as many other serious health conditions. Poor oral health as a child can have long term health implications and is proven to impact a child's self-esteem and ability to excel in school.



*Cook County is designated as a Dental Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) by the federal government. Often referred to as “underserved,” residents in these areas have limited or no access to local dental care.*

## THE SOLUTION

Re-opening dental clinics is critical to serve as a primary source of health care for residents in underserved areas. These clinics will offer preventative and basic restorative dental services, providing accessible and quality dental treatment that local residents need and deserve. They will help relieve an overwhelmed health care system, address the epidemic of childhood dental disease, and help to ensure improved overall health. It is estimated that each full time clinic will provide seven new jobs and serve 5,000 patients annually.

