

## Prevent childhood dental disease through early screening and intervention

### Issue Overview

Children need to be healthy to succeed in school and later in life. One of the most neglected overall health issues facing children today is oral health. Dental decay is the most common chronic childhood disease in America—five times more common than asthma. With well-documented associations between oral disease and serious lifelong health issues, such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke, it is time our health care system caught up with the needs of our state.

When tooth decay occurs in children under 5 years of age, it is called Early Childhood Caries (ECC). ECC is an infectious disease. There are cost effective prevention methods to immunize New Hampshire's children against oral disease the same way we immunize children against other childhood diseases.

The good news is that dental disease is preventable. By working together to ensure that all children have access to the prevention treatments they need to stay healthy, we can keep this destructive disease from ever occurring. However, a shortage of pediatric

and dental providers in some areas of the state means we need to be creative when we address this issue. If we can integrate oral health into pediatric well-child visits, we can reach thousands of children in their earliest years.

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) encourages both dental and non-dental health care professionals to assess the risk for dental disease in infants, children and adolescents. The National Institutes of Health indicates that every \$1 dollar invested in prevention saves \$38 dollars in treatment costs.

According to New Hampshire's Dr. Suzanne Boulter, a Dartmouth Family Practice Program pediatrician, faculty member and Oral Health Chair for the American Academy of Pediatrics, "integrating dental care and health care is routinely practiced in more than half the states in the nation, including every New England State except New Hampshire". It is time that New Hampshire's health care practices reflect what is best for New Hampshire's children and their families.



*The New Hampshire Child Advocacy Network (NH CAN) is a statewide, nonpartisan network of child-serving organizations working to improve the well-being of New Hampshire's children by driving government policy, changing budget priorities and inspiring community action. Each year, a consensus of nearly 100 NH CAN partner organizations and advisors develop a collective set of Priorities for New Hampshire's Children, a plan of action for the legislature, state leaders, state agencies and communities that is shared across the Granite State.*

# 2009 Priorities for New Hampshire's Children

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priorities

## Proposed Solution

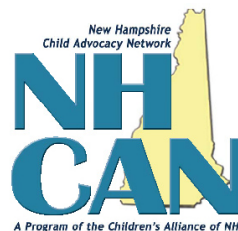
Strengthening the integration of oral health and primary health care is essential. We have the opportunity and responsibility to learn best practices from other states and bring those exemplary strategies to the Granite State. The NH Oral Health Coalition has submitted HB414 to establish a study commission. This commission will explore and recommend strategies to improve integration of oral health with primary care services in order to prevent childhood dental disease.

## Call to Action

Be ready to supply information regarding the need for pediatric oral health care by providing testimony or letters of support.

## Find out More

NH Oral Health Coalition is the NH CAN partner for this Priority. The New Hampshire Oral Health Coalition is a broad group of individuals and entities concerned with oral health. They include representatives from the oral health community, the medical community, the legislature, advocacy groups, the insurance industry and the education community. For more information, contact Angela Boyle at [aboyle@bistatepca.org](mailto:aboyle@bistatepca.org).



**Children's Alliance of  
New Hampshire**

**Raising Our Voice for Children**

**NH CAN is a project of the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire**

*For more information on the 2009 Priorities for New Hampshire Children, please visit [www.ChildrenNH.org](http://www.ChildrenNH.org)*

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