



## Media Release

For Immediate Release: November 10, 2016

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### Virginia Receives C+ Grade on Oral Health *Statewide Coalition Unveils Country's First Oral Health Report Card*

RICHMOND, VA [November 10, 2016] – Virginia earns a C+ when it comes to oral health, according to a first-ever statewide report card issued by the Virginia Oral Health Coalition, a statewide alliance of dental and medical providers, safety net clinics, youth and family advocates, and community members working to improve oral health.

The Virginia Oral Health *Report Card* was unveiled at today's annual Virginia Oral Health Summit in Richmond, where more than 200 stakeholders from dentistry, academia, medicine, business and philanthropy shared ideas and learned the latest on dental health care trends. The report is the product of a seven-month, inclusive process involving a diverse work group of stakeholders from across the Commonwealth.

"Virginia is the first state in the nation to issue a statewide oral health report card, and the transparent and collaborative process demonstrates the strong commitment that exists in the state to elevate its oral health goals," said Tanya Dorf Brunner, President of the American Network of Oral Health Coalitions. "Virginia has set a high standard in measuring itself that other states will look to when planning their own report cards."

The Virginia Oral Health Coalition and its partners are committed to improving oral health and improving lives in Virginia. They will use the report card to highlight areas that need improvement and track progress over time. The Coalition will convene regional stakeholders to use data to identify gaps and create programmatic and policy solutions to drive change at the local level.

"Dental disease is preventable and Virginia has the necessary partnerships and commitment to help children and adults improve their oral health," said Sarah Holland, executive director for the Virginia Oral Health Coalition. "With a renewed focus, investment and innovation, we will achieve the best oral health in the nation."

The report card reveals that less than 25 percent of Virginia's most vulnerable children ages 1 to 2 have seen a dentist for a preventive visit. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Dental Association and American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry recommend a dental visit by a child's first birthday. Early dental visits improve a child's health and reduce dental costs throughout their preschool years by 40 percent, according to a study by Dr. Jessica Lee at the University of North Carolina. While this number is improving, Virginia has a tremendous opportunity to build on this progress.

Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease for children and teenagers in Virginia and the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control. Children with poor oral health are nearly three times more likely to miss school, according to Lee's study.

Pediatricians have an important role to play in the oral health of their patients. A child typically visits the pediatrician seven times in the first year of life for well visits. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends applying fluoride varnish and referring children to a dentist as part of the preventive care pediatricians provide. According to a study on early dental visits by Dr. Gary Rozier and colleagues at the University of North Carolina, a child is three times more likely to visit a dentist if referred by a medical provider.

The Virginia Oral Health *Report Card* found that only 5 percent of eligible pediatricians are billing Medicaid for applying fluoride varnish to young children's teeth. Fluoride varnish is one of the simplest and most effective ways to prevent cavities. In Virginia, medical providers, including licensed practical nurses and physicians, can apply fluoride varnish.

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“Pediatricians have a unique opportunity to impact the oral health of our young patients,” said Helen Ragazzi, a Richmond pediatrician and representative of the Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. “In Virginia we’ve been working diligently to make our members aware of the recent recommendations by our national association and the U.S. Preventive Task Force to include fluoride varnish application and referral to a dentist as part of the preventive services we provide our young patients. We are committed to seeing the number of pediatricians participating in the oral health of their patients improve,”

For adults, the report card reveals several reasons for concern. For example, only 38 percent of adults have dental coverage. The report also found that only 44 percent of Virginia women see a dentist during pregnancy—a disappointing figure because experts encourage a dental visit during this nine-month period.

Research outlined in the Surgeon General’s report on oral health links poor oral health to diabetes and heart disease. Adults with missing or unhealthy teeth can also be at a disadvantage when competing for good-paying jobs.

“Oral health is an essential part of overall health, with poor oral health affecting far more than just our teeth—it impacts our economy, our schools and our health care system,” said Robin Haldiman, CEO of CHIP of Roanoke Valley, and board chair of the Virginia Oral Health Coalition. “If Virginia is going to be the healthiest state in the nation our oral health must be the best, too.”

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The Virginia Oral Health Coalition is a nonprofit health care advocacy organization striving for comprehensive health care for all Virginians that includes oral health. The Coalition started in 2010 and more than 100 organizations and individuals work to change perceptions of oral health, remove known barriers between people and oral health services, and build an effective oral health infrastructure by ensuring that Virginia's dental health system can meet the needs of underserved populations.