

December 8, 2021

ADM Rachel L. Levine, MD  
Assistant Secretary for Health  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW Room 716G  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear ADM Levine:

We are writing to you, on behalf of the Oral Health Pandemic Response Workgroup, to ask you to provide leadership throughout the Department to ensure that oral health is recognized as integral to overall health and included, as appropriate, in HHS' activities and deliberations.

While research continues to assess the association between oral health and various systemic conditions, the evidence supports a relationship between oral health and overall health. A collaborative white paper, entitled "The effects of oral health on systemic health," published by the General Dentistry and American Family Physician journals, provides an excellent summary of the relationship between oral health and several systemic health conditions. Click [here](#) to access this paper.

The Oral Health Pandemic Response Workgroup is an ad hoc gathering of executives across the dental landscape. We represent providers, dental plans, dental service organizations, dental practices, payers, dental supply manufacturers, state dental boards, community clinics, the public health community, government, academia, philanthropy, advocates, and members of the community. The group was originally formed in April of 2020 to address critical issues related to oral health created by the pandemic but is now also addressing the broader role of oral health providers and stakeholders in overall health care, including medical/dental care integration. The pandemic has clearly shown that oral health inequities in our nation are profound. Access to oral health care remains out of reach for low-income families and individuals, communities of color, Tribal communities, and many rural communities.

Our specific ask is that, in addition to administering its oral health policy and programs, the Administration capitalize on opportunities to advance oral health across its other administrative, policymaking, legislative and regulatory activities. The ongoing revision of the HHS strategic Plan provides an excellent opportunity for the comprehensive inclusion of oral health across the Agency's efforts.

Additional ways of integrating oral health into the broader activities of the Administration would be:

- ensuring that oral health experts, including practitioners, are included on all health policy commissions, task forces, and health-related meetings hosted by the Administration;
- ensuring that oral health is taken into account in all health policy decision-making; and
- convening an oral health summit or creating other opportunities to seek input from oral health stakeholders about opportunities for HHS to advance oral health and oral/medical integration.

We were pleased to see the appointment of Dr. Natalia Chalmers to the position of Chief Dental Officer within the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, located within the Immediate Office of the Administrator, and we would like to acknowledge the exceptional leadership of

other key oral health professionals within the Administration, including RADM Tim Ricks, CAPT Renee Joskow, and Mr. Andy Snyder.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our suggestions with you and your federal colleagues at your convenience. We would also be honored to participate in developing a plan of action and in bringing stakeholders to the table to discuss and explore opportunities to promote oral health throughout HHS and the Administration.

For follow-up to our request, please contact Dr. Michael Monopoli, Vice-President for Grant Strategy at CareQuest Institute for Oral Health, [mmonopoli@carequest.org](mailto:mmonopoli@carequest.org) .

Respectfully,

Members of the Oral Health Pandemic Response Workgroup:

American Association of Dental Boards  
American Dental Association  
American Dental Hygienists' Association  
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors  
CareQuest Institute for Oral Health  
Community Catalyst  
Dental Trade Alliance  
Hispanic Dental Association  
National Dental Association  
National Dental Hygienists' Association  
National Rural Health Association  
Oral Health Progress and Equity Network (OPEN)  
Project Accessible Oral Health