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**ORAL HEALTH AMERICA SUPPORTS FINDINGS OF THE INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE'S
REPORT ON ACCESS TO ORAL HEALTH CARE**

July 18, 2011, Chicago, IL—Oral Health America (OHA) applauds the Institute of Medicine (IOM) for its careful research into access to oral health care in America, as documented in *Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Vulnerable and Underserved Populations*, a report released this week. Through programs that positively affect the oral and overall health of Americans across the entire age spectrum, OHA is committed to doing its part to see that the IOM's oral health access goals and recommendations are achieved.

"Access to oral health and dental care is very much about creating opportunities for all Americans to benefit from the innovative research, technology and practices that prevent disease—both oral and systemic--and enable our country to be healthy and productive," said Dr. Caswell Evans, Jr., Associate Dean for Prevention and Public Health Sciences, College of Dentistry, University of Illinois, Chicago, who served on the report committee. "But it doesn't end there. Understanding how and why our diverse population experiences oral disease is vitally important, as is ensuring adequate and appropriate care for Americans of all ages, health literacy levels, and cultural backgrounds. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work if we are determined to end oral health disparities."

The committee of professionals who created the IOM report, including Dr. Evans, a member of OHA's Board of Directors, recommends providing oral health services in a variety of settings and allowing dental professionals to practice to the full extent of their training in various settings, both in and out of the traditional dental office. OHA's Smiles Across America® program does just that by supporting school-based sealant programs for children who might not otherwise have access to care.

The report also suggests that states should raise Medicaid reimbursement rates for dental providers and that dental coverage should be extended to adult Medicaid beneficiaries, while also streamlining administrative procedures. OHA fully supports these recommendations, which would increase access to care for children who already have dental coverage through Medicaid and bring new coverage to adults and older adults with low-incomes who currently have very few options for dental care.

The IOM report further highlights the need for greater diversity among the dental health workforce, to bring cultural competency and engagement to our populations who suffer the greatest disparities in accessing care.

“By working closely with our community partners and by collaborating on a national level with partners who represent diverse constituents, we hope to help support a future where racial background is not determinant of access.,” said Beth Truett, President and CEO, Oral Health America. “We welcome the findings of this report as a roadmap for creating greater impact through our programs.”

Oral Health America’s mission is to change lives by connecting communities with resources to increase access to oral health care, education, and advocacy for all Americans, especially those most vulnerable. For more information, visit www.oralhealthamerica.org.

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