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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Smiles Across Minnesota Expands Program to International Falls, South Koochiching-Rainy River and Littlefork-Big Falls

*School-Based Dental Program Targets Elementary School and Head Start Children*

International Falls, Minn. (October 13, 2010) – Smiles Across Minnesota expands its statewide preventive dental program to several Northern Minnesota school districts: International Falls, South Koochiching – Rainy River and Littlefork – Big Falls on Friday, October 15. The program will help improve the oral health of uninsured and underinsured children. Smiles Across Minnesota provides children ages three to 12 with preventive dental services – including cleanings, fluoride treatments and sealants – right within the schools at no cost to the schools.

“We are pleased to help bring this important program to some of our most northern Minnesota school districts as it aligns with our focus on helping youth and children succeed,” Shelley Valentini, Executive Director, United Way of Northeastern Minnesota. “When Children’s Dental Services and Delta Dental of Minnesota introduced the Smiles Across Minnesota program to us, we realized it fit the exact need of our communities as on average 50% of our children are eligible to receive these services. Children need to be able to attend school at their healthiest to increase their potential for learning.”

Dental services will be offered to all students at participating schools and administered by a local dental hygienist and dental assistant employed by Children’s Dental Services. “Preventive measures, such as education, sealants and fluoride treatments, have a long-term impact on a child’s future dental health and well-being,” explains Sarah Wovcha, executive director of Children’s Dental Services and co-chair of Smiles Across Minnesota. “Community based programs are cost-effective. Children receiving dental sealants in school-based programs have 60 percent less decay for up to five years. We anticipate serving 500-800 children in the first year.”

Children’s Dental Services will provide care for children on public assistance. Uninsured students who are income-eligible will receive free care through the program, paid for by charitable corporate and foundation contributions. If a family already has commercial insurance, those children and their parents will be encouraged to visit their previously established dental home. If they do not have a primary dentist, children will be referred either to a local dentist or the family will be assisted in finding appropriate services. All children receiving care will need parental consent.

(more)

## *Smiles Across Minnesota Kicks Off in International Falls...Page 2*

“As the state’s largest dental benefits administrator – we are extremely pleased to see the problems of dentally uninsured and underserved children being acknowledged as an important unmet healthcare need,” said Ann Johnson, director of community affairs at Delta Dental of Minnesota and co-chair of Smiles Across Minnesota. “We are also pleased to provide start-up funds for the program and partner with three outstanding Minnesota organizations that are deeply committed to improving the health of underserved children — Oral Health America, Children’s Dental Services and United Way of Northeastern Minnesota.

“Smiles Across Minnesota is a model Smiles Across America® program partner, demonstrating how to successfully collaborate with communities and expand services, while identifying needs and eliminating barriers to oral health care and education throughout the state,” said Beth Truett, President and CEO of Oral Health America.

**About Children’s Dental Services** – CDS is an independent, non-profit that has provided dental services to children since 1919. CDS is the only Minnesota agency dedicated exclusively to providing oral health outreach, education, preventive and restorative treatment to children. During its history CDS pioneered two major concepts for making affordable dental care accessible to children: 1) CDS was the first dental program in the nation to provide on-site dental care to Head Start children; and 2) CDS provides full on-site mobile preventive and restorative care to children in schools and community based settings. CDS provides dental care to children, birth to age 21 and pregnant women. CDS offers a sliding fee scale under which reduced-cost or free care is provided. CDS employs staff who collectively speak 15 different languages, making them well equipped to serve bilingual or multilingual families.

**About United Way of Northeastern Minnesota** – The United Way of Northeastern Minnesota’s has been in existence since 1966 covering five counties serving the needs of individuals and families. Their mission is to unite and focus local communities in creating measurable results to improve people’s lives and strengthen families. More than just a fundraising organization UWNEMN works on assessing needs with the goal of creating long lasting changes with a focus on education, health and financial stability. For additional information go to [www.unitedwaynemn.org](http://www.unitedwaynemn.org)

**About Delta Dental of Minnesota** – An independent, non-profit health services company, we take seriously our mission to serve Minnesotans’ oral health needs. Since 1969, we’ve accomplished this mission by providing the best access across the state to oral health care through affordable dental plans. We also know the importance of doing right by the communities we serve. We’ve partnered with community organizations and social service agencies to address the dental needs of Minnesota’s underserved and uninsured populations. In 2009, we contributed more than \$985,000 in grants and donations to support a range of programs addressing oral health and community needs. Delta Dental of Minnesota is based in Eagan, Minnesota. Delta Dental is a registered mark of Delta Dental Plans Association. Delta Dental of Minnesota is an independent nonprofit dental services company and is an authorized licensee of the Delta Dental Plans Association of Oak Brook, Illinois.

**About Smiles Across America®(SAA)**– SAA is a signature program of Oral Health America, a national non-profit organization dedicated to changing lives by connecting communities with resources to increase access to care, education and advocacy. SAA improves the health of elementary school students by supporting oral disease prevention services in school-based or school-linked settings, and demonstrating to communities that healthy mouths are integral to overall health. For more information, visit <http://www.oralhealthamerica.org>.

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