

KEY MESSAGES FROM *A STATE OF DECAY*, VOL. IV

***A State of Decay, Vol. IV* is a state-by-state analysis of variables that affect the oral health of older adults in the United States.** By 2029, the baby boomer generation will include older adults ranging from ages 65 to 83. While the 65+ population will fall under the same Medicare system, the needs of the oldest and youngest baby boomers will look very different. The purpose of this report is to assist states, advocates and public health coalitions to shine a light on the adversities at the state and national level and rally others to change both conditions and outcomes for older adults.

Since the last report in 2016, an increasing number of states are taking action to advance the oral health outcomes of older adults. The fourth volume of *A State of Decay* highlights the overall progress in areas including community water fluoridation, expansion of adult Medicaid dental benefits, completion of Basic Screening Surveys and State Oral Health Plans with SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Limited) objectives for older adults.

States are employing creative strategies to address the oral health needs of older adults. The older adult population of each state is unique and requires policies and strategies to reflect that. As evident in the State Spotlight section of this report, many states have created coalitions of stakeholders in aging, oral health and public health to devise specific strategies to address the oral health needs of older adults in their states.

Socioeconomic factors, such as income, race, gender, and education determine older adults' oral health outcomes. The rate of severe tooth loss and recent dental visit data, analyzed individually on a national basis, showed a consistent, linear association with household income (see Figure 3). As income and education levels rose, so did the probability of good oral health. Further, African American and Hispanic seniors are two times more likely to have untreated decay than their Caucasian counterparts.

Federal and state policies are needed to address the underlying, systemic variables that prohibit older adults from achieving good oral health outcomes. Oral Health America offers state advocates these recommendations to improve the oral health of older adults in their communities:

- Reinstate, establish, or maintain an extensive adult Medicaid dental benefit
- Advocate for comprehensive dental coverage in Medicare
- Sustain or expand Community Water Fluoridation
- Include SMART objectives for older adults in all State Oral Health Plans
- Conduct Basic Screening Surveys of older adults in all states