



## FACT SHEET: OLDER ADULTS & ORAL HEALTH

### OLDER ADULTS ARE *LEADING BY LIVING*

Older adults have experience, knowledge and oftentimes a deep sense of tradition. They enjoy life and know what they need to do to keep themselves healthy and living not only longer, but happier and in better health than before.

They are our friends, our caregivers, our spouses, our parents; most importantly, they are our role models. Older adults teach other generations how they, too, can live healthier lives.

They are *Leading by Living*.

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### OLDER ADULTS ARE LIVING LONGER

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It is expected that by 2030, there will be **72.1 million people above the age of 65** in the U.S., or 20% of the total population.<sup>xx</sup> Older adults are the fastest-growing segment of the population, and it's estimated that **one fourth of 65-year-olds will live past age 90.**<sup>v</sup> This demographic shift has called for research that helps improve quality of life, rather than only extend the lifespan.<sup>v</sup>

As part of Oral Health America's *Campaign for Oral Health Equity*, we are working to make it easier for older adults to maintain their overall health by helping them learn how to keep their teeth and mouth healthy.

#### Why are older adults living longer?

More older adults report being in good health than those in previous generations, and there has been a decrease in deaths from major diseases including Alzheimer's, blood clots, and cancer.<sup>i</sup> Seniors are choosing to live on their own, retaining independence and maintaining a positive outlook on life.<sup>ii</sup>

Many are going back to school or learning new skills, while others continue to work, volunteer or even serve as caregivers for other family members or friends. Having regular social time with family and friends, both in-person and online, helps older adults be healthier, physically and emotionally.<sup>v</sup>

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## OLDER ADULTS HAVE UNIQUE ORAL HEALTH CONCERNS

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Your oral health affects every aspect of your overall health, and this is especially true for older adults. Gum disease, sensitive teeth, diabetes and dry mouth are just some concerns that are more common in adults over the age of 65, making preventive care that much more critical to avoid more serious complications and expensive dental procedures.

Even though good oral health care is so important to overall health, **many older adults do not have dental insurance.** Nearly 55 million seniors access healthcare services through Medicare, which does not cover routine dental services such as screenings, exams, cleanings, fillings, extractions or dentures.

Along with other organizations, Oral Health America is calling for research and the development of a financially viable **oral health benefit in Medicare.** This is a necessary step to ensure that older adults in all economic situations can access oral healthcare.

### What can older adults do to maintain their oral health?

Preventive care is the best way that we can help ourselves avoid major oral health problems down the road, and is especially important as we age. The most important preventive behaviors that all of us can do are brushing, flossing, and regularly visiting a dental professional.

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## OLDER ADULTS SERVE AS ROLE MODELS TO THOSE AROUND THEM

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It is important today more than ever for younger generations to have positive examples of how to live a healthy, happy life.<sup>ii</sup> Older adults serve as role models for the children growing into tomorrow's adults.<sup>vii</sup> These generations learn by watching the world around them.<sup>x</sup>

Children tend to grow up to be a lot like their parents and those who raise them; social scientists and genetic researchers alike have found many behaviors and traits that reoccur from one generation to the next.<sup>xvii</sup> **Children often follow the behavior of their parents, and this includes making both healthy and unhealthy choices.**<sup>vii</sup>

Younger generations and teens benefit from having older adult role models, saying that they value having someone who listens to them with undivided attention.<sup>vii</sup> Role models can help shape how children and teens behave at school, in relationships or when making difficult decisions.<sup>ii</sup>

### How does serving as a role model benefit older adults?

Research shows that interacting with young people allow seniors to make connections with other generations, improving relationships and relieving boredom while improving overall body health.<sup>vii</sup>

### How can older adults continue to serve as role models?

Being an effective role model means taking a close, honest look at how you live your life.<sup>ix</sup> It means taking good care of yourself — getting enough sleep, making time to exercise, eating nutritious food, and of course keeping good oral health habits.<sup>ix</sup> Continue enjoying the positive things in life, most importantly, your life with friends and family.<sup>xvii</sup>

## HOW CAN YOU MAKE AN IMPACT?

Support Oral Health America by raising awareness about the importance of education and access to care for older adults as they continue *Leading by Living*. Join us as we strive to impact the lives of older adults. Together, we can make a difference.

Visit [oralhealthamerica.org/seniors](http://oralhealthamerica.org/seniors) for more information.

<sup>i</sup> AARP. “If You’re 65, You Have 18 to 20 More Years to Live.” <http://blog.aarp.org/2014/10/09/if-youre-65-you-have-18-to-20-more-years-to-live/>

<sup>ii</sup> ABC News, “Older Americans Living Longer, Study Says.” August 10, 2017.

<sup>iii</sup> American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. “Facts for Families: Children and Role Models.” No. 99, September 2011.

<sup>iv</sup> American Dental Association. Aging and Dental Health. <http://www.ada.org/en/member-center/oral-health-topics/aging-and-dental-health>

<sup>v</sup> “Older Adults’ Health and Age-Related Changes: Reality Versus Myth.” *American Psychological Association*. 2017.

<sup>vi</sup> The Atlantic. “Making Aging Positive.” June 1, 2014.

<sup>vii</sup> Berkley Wellness. “5 Ways Adults Can Be Healthy Role Models for Children.” <http://www.berkeleywellness.com/healthy-community/health-care-policy/article/5-things-grownups-can-do-are-good-children>

<sup>viii</sup> Healthy Aging Partnership. “Interaction Between Older Adults and Children Benefit Both.”

<sup>ix</sup> Huffington Post. “10 Ways to Become the parent — and Role Model — Your Kids Really Need.” [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-suzanne-gelb/want-to-raise-awesome-kids-10-ways-to-become-a-\\_b\\_5734918.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-suzanne-gelb/want-to-raise-awesome-kids-10-ways-to-become-a-_b_5734918.html)

<sup>x</sup> Love To Know. “How Children Learn by Observing Behavior of Adults.”

[http://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Children\\_Learn\\_Best\\_by\\_Observing\\_Behavior\\_of\\_Adults](http://kids.lovetoknow.com/wiki/Children_Learn_Best_by_Observing_Behavior_of_Adults)

<sup>xi</sup> “Study of Relationships Between Adult Children and Parents.” *Medical News Today*. May 6, 2009

<sup>xii</sup> National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. “Older Adults and Oral Health.”

<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/OralHealthInformation/OlderAdults/>

<sup>xiii</sup> National Institute of Mental Health. “Older Adults and Mental Health.”

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/older-adults-and-mental-health/index.shtml>

<sup>xiv</sup> Next Avenue. “Even after they’re grown, we can positively influence them by the way we live our lives.”

<http://www.nextavenue.org/how-be-role-model-your-adult-children/>

<sup>xv</sup> Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. “Older Adults.” <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/older-adults>

<sup>xvi</sup> Oral Health America Public Opinion Poll. Grandfamilies. 2016.

<sup>xvii</sup> Parenting Exchange. “Parents Are Powerful Role Models for Children.” <http://www.easternflorida.edu/community-resources/child-development-centers/parent-resource-library/documents/parents-powerful-role-models.pdf>

<sup>xviii</sup> Research!America. “Research in Action: Improving Health, Saving Money. Facts about: Oral Health in Older Adults.”

<http://www.researchamerica.org/sites/default/files/Oral%20Health%20in%20Older%20Americans.pdf>

<sup>xvix</sup> “People are Living Longer and Healthier: Now What?” *Science Daily*. March 24, 2010.

<sup>xx</sup> U.S. Census. <https://www.census.gov/prod/2014pubs/p25-1140.pdf>