

# Achieving Better Overall Health Through Improved Oral Care

Greater Access to Self-Care Products is Key

## Oral Health Concerns are Decreasing Americans' **QUALITY OF LIFE**

Tooth decay, dental caries, gingivitis, periodontitis, and other oral health conditions take a toll on Americans. In fact, the implications of neglecting oral health extend far beyond the dental chair, profoundly impacting the physical, mental, and economic wellbeing of individuals and the nation as a whole.

While people with oral health concerns may simply avoid smiling, oral health isn't just cosmetic. An unhealthy mouth makes it difficult to bite and chew food or to even talk and communicate, and can also cause pain, embarrassment, and anxiety affecting one's overall quality of life.<sup>2</sup>

**46%**  
Nearly half of Americans ages 30 and older show signs of gum disease.<sup>1</sup>

An unhealthy mouth is a risk factor for chronic diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, Alzheimer's, COPD, liver disease and more.<sup>3</sup> In fact, kids miss

**34 million**  
school hours and adults lose **\$46 billion**

in workplace productivity each year due to untreated oral disease.<sup>4</sup>

## GAPS IN ACCESS

Americans' oral health differs significantly. Social determinants including age and economic status affect access to oral health care across the country, with the burden of untreated oral disease falling<sup>5</sup> on vulnerable groups.<sup>6</sup>

**1 in 5 low-income adults** rate their oral health as poor, with more than **42%** having difficulty biting and chewing, **43%** experiencing physical pain, and **19%** having difficulty speaking.<sup>7</sup>

**Young adults** (ages 18-34) are another group disproportionately affected, with **41%** reporting pain as their top oral health problem, and **35%** indicating they are embarrassed about the condition of their mouth.<sup>8</sup>

**Rural Americans** face additional oral health challenges as they are less likely to receive preventive dental services, are more likely to seek dental care in an emergency department, and have nearly double the prevalence of tooth loss compared to others.<sup>9</sup>

**Cavities are the most common chronic disease** among children, affecting **1 in 4** preschoolers. Children from low-income families are twice as likely to have cavities as children from higher-income families.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CDC Oral Health Basics

<sup>2</sup> ADA Health Policy Institute, Oral Health and Wellbeing in the United States

<sup>3</sup> CDC Addressing Oral Health Inequities

<sup>4</sup> CDC Health and Economic Benefits of Oral Disease Interventions

<sup>5</sup> NIH Oral Health in America, Advances and Challenges

<sup>6</sup> ADA Health Policy Institute, Oral Health and Wellbeing in the United States

<sup>7</sup> ADA Health Policy Institute, Oral Health and Wellbeing in the United States

<sup>8</sup> NIH Oral Health in America, Advances and Challenges

<sup>9</sup> NIH Oral Health in America, Advances and Challenges

<sup>10</sup> CDC Oral Health Fast Facts

## Brush-Up on **SELF-CARE**

Oral health is essential to overall health,<sup>11</sup> and access to everyday preventive dental self-care is a critical public health strategy. In addition, encouraging individuals to be active participants in caring for their oral health through basic practices like regular brushing and cleaning between their teeth, can profoundly reduce oral health issues and reduce the likelihood of costly problems down the road. For example, preventive oral care can save people with a chronic condition like diabetes up to \$574 per year, up to \$675 for people with coronary artery disease, and up to \$1,718 for people with both conditions.<sup>12</sup>

## THE SOLUTION:

### Put More Teeth into FSAs and HSAs

Americans are asking for increased flexibility to use the pre-tax savings in their Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) and Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) for better self-care, including for oral care products. Unfortunately, most products for oral health care are currently not considered eligible medical expenses for FSA and HSA spending.

Expanding eligibility to include manual and electric toothbrushes, water flossers, mouthwash, anti-cavity toothpaste, and other products with evidence demonstrating oral health benefit, would give consumers more power to make better oral care decisions.

### FSA/HSA eligibility expansion will:



**Close gaps in oral health disparities**



**Help Americans improve their overall health and well-being**



**Lower overall healthcare spending in America**

**Good oral health supports the overall health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities, and the nation.**

- National Institutes of Health (NIH)

**70 million** Americans enrolled in FSAs and HSAs deserve the flexibility to use their pre-tax dollars to support their oral health at home.

<sup>11</sup> NIH Oral Health in America, Advances and Challenges

<sup>12</sup> Association Between Preventive Dental Care and Healthcare Cost for Enrollees with Diabetes