

I. INTRODUCTION

The mouth is our primary connection to the world. It is how we take in water and nutrients to sustain life, our primary means of communication, the most visible sign of our mood, and a major part of how we appear to others. Oral health is an essential and integral component of overall health throughout life and is much more than just healthy teeth. Oral refers to the whole mouth, including the teeth, gums, hard and soft palate, linings of the mouth and throat, tongue, lips, salivary glands, chewing muscles, and upper and lower jaws. Not only does good oral health mean being free of tooth decay and gum disease, but it also means being free of chronic oral pain conditions, oral cancer, birth defects such as cleft lip and palate, and other conditions that affect the mouth and throat. Good oral health also includes the ability to carry on the most basic human functions such as chewing, swallowing, speaking, smiling, kissing, and singing.

The mouth is an integral part of human anatomy and plays a major role in our overall physiology. Thus, oral health is intimately related to the health of the rest of the body. For example, mounting evidence suggests that infections in the mouth such as periodontal (gum) diseases may increase the risk of heart disease, may put pregnant women at greater risk of premature delivery, and may complicate control of blood sugar for people living with diabetes. Conversely, changes in the mouth often are the first signs of problems elsewhere in the body, such as infectious diseases, immune disorders, nutritional deficiencies, and cancer.

This report summarizes the most current information available on the oral disease burden of people in <STATE>. It also highlights groups and regions in our state that are at highest risk of oral health problems and discusses strategies to prevent these conditions and provide access to dental care. Comparisons are made with national data whenever possible and to the *Healthy People 2010* objectives when appropriate. For some conditions, national data, but not state data, are available at this time. It is hoped that this information will help raise awareness of the need for monitoring the oral health burden in <STATE> and guide efforts to prevent and treat oral diseases and enhance the quality of life of <STATE>'s residents.