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NEW SURVEY: MAJORITY OF AMERICANS SUPPORT MID-LEVEL DENTAL PROVIDER TO EXPAND ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE

Four-in-Ten Americans or Their Family Members Put Off Dental Care Due to Cost

BATTLE CREEK, Mich. – Millions of Americans cannot find affordable dental care in their communities and many want to explore mid-level providers as a way to improve their access to needed oral health care, according to a national survey released today by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The survey reveals that many Americans are struggling to get the care that they need. Forty-one percent of Americans report they or someone in their household has put off dental care because of cost and 30% say they do not have a place to receive dental care.

Based on a poll of 1,023 adults, the survey, conducted by Lake Research Partners, finds that more than 80% of Americans believe it is difficult for people to get free or low-cost dental care in their communities, and think the number of Americans who cannot access dental care is a problem.

With close to 50 million Americans living in federally-designated dentist shortage areas, the majority of respondents say they support mid-level dental providers like dental therapists to help fill the nation's shortage gaps.

As several states look to bring a pioneering Alaska-based mid-level dental program to their own communities as a way to expand access to dental care, this survey reveals public support and confirms need across the country for the program model.

“This survey clearly shows that people throughout the country are struggling to get dental care,” said Sterling K. Speirn, president and CEO of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. “We know the impact that poor oral health has on overall health and well-being, so we must look at using mid-level providers such as dental therapists to ensure that children can get the preventive dental care they need.”

Among the key findings:

- **Affordability is a barrier to dental care.** Forty-one percent of respondents say that they or someone in their household has put off dental care in the last twelve months because of cost.
- **Most Americans value regular dental care, but four in ten lack dental insurance.** Seventy-nine percent of respondents say receiving regular dental care is important. Forty

percent, however, do not have dental insurance. In fact, 100 million Americans, including 25 million children, do not have dental insurance.

- **Many Americans have no place to go to get regular dental care.** Thirty percent of respondents say they do not have a place to receive regular dental care near where they live.
- **Most Americans support dental therapy as one way to help address the dental gap.** Seventy-six percent of respondents say they support the training of mid-level dental providers such as dental therapists to provide preventive, routine dental care to people without it.

Those most likely to be putting off care due to cost are those with annual incomes of less than \$30,000 (55%), those without dental insurance (54%), and those with a high school diploma or less (47%). In addition, Latinos (47%) are more likely than African Americans (36%) and Whites (42%) to have put off dental care in the last twelve months due to costs. Women are also more likely than men (47% vs. 35%) to have put off dental care because of cost.

Lake Research Partners conducted the nationwide survey of 1,023 adults age 18 and older between July 12 and July 18, 2011. Lake Research Partners is a public policy and opinion research firm specializing in health care issues located in Washington, D.C., Berkeley, CA and New York, NY.

In November 2010, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation launched a major initiative to improve access to dental care for vulnerable populations. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation is currently working with Ohio, New Mexico, Kansas, Washington and Vermont to establish dental therapists to help expand access to needed dental care. More than a dozen states are considering similar options.

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The W.K. Kellogg Foundation supports children, families and communities as they strengthen and create conditions that propel vulnerable children to achieve success as individuals and as contributors to the larger community and society. For more information, visit www.wkkf.org.

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