The Oral Health of Older Adults

Facts and Statistics

The Seniors Population is Growing

- Since 1980 the population of seniors in the United States has grown by almost 50 percent, from 25 million to 37 million in 2006.¹
- By 2030 seniors will represent nearly 20% of Washington’s population; currently seniors represent about 12%.²

Too Many Older Adults Have Oral Disease

- More than 38% of all adults in the state have had teeth removed due to tooth decay or gum disease and 20% have lost all of their teeth.³
- Nearly one-fifth of older adults – estimated to be 150,000 people in Washington – have untreated dental cavities.⁴
- Twenty-five percent of adults 65 to 74 nationwide have severe periodontal (gum) disease.⁵

Oral Disease is Linked to Serious Health Problems

- Gum disease has been linked to health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and pneumonia.⁶
- Research has shown a two-way relationship between diabetes and gum disease. Poor gum health makes it harder to control blood sugar and poorly controlled blood sugar makes people more likely to have gum disease.⁷

Few Seniors Have a Dental Benefit after Retirement

- The older a person becomes the less likely they are to have dental insurance: 62% of people aged 51-64 have dental insurance compared with 37% for ages 65-74 and 26% for the 75 and older age group.⁸
- The poorest older adults had dental insurance due to Medicaid benefits, but that benefit was repealed.

Sources

² OFM, 2008.
⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (December 19, 2003). Public Health and Aging: Retention of Natural Teeth Among Older Adults—United States, 2002. MMWR Weekly. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5250a3.htm
⁶ Journal of the American Dental Association: 137(10), Supplement 2.
⁷ Mealey, Brian. Periodontal Disease and Diabetes: A Two-Way Street. Journal of the American Dental Association 2006; 137: 26S-31S.