

Introductory Message

Two decades ago, Surgeon General David Satcher released a major report examining the nation’s oral health. This first-time report was considered a public health milestone, emphatic in its assertion that oral health was inextricably linked to overall health and well-being. It also took great care to illuminate the stark disparities and inequities that exist with regard to disease burden and accessing and affording oral health care in this country.

Seventeen years after its publication, Dr. Satcher, along with Dr. Joyce H. Nottingham, partially assessed the progress made since the 2000 report, publishing a paper in the American Journal of Public Health. Based on emerging data, they offered the American people some early perspective in the form of good and bad news. The good, they proffered, was that “our understanding of oral diseases continues to grow.” And the bad? Too many Americans still suffered from diseases of the mouth, the majority of which were related to oral health disparities.

That piece, it turns out, was a fitting, if unintended, prologue to this report, which is a sweeping, comprehensive effort to tell the whole story of the state of oral health in America. And, as the title suggests, in the last 20 years, there has been progress in some areas, and in others, a collective realization that far more work needs to be done.

It is our hope and intent that this report will serve as the foundation for that work. Work that—in light of a global pandemic that so plainly shows that the mouth is the gateway to the rest of the body and that those individuals and communities most affected in the pandemic are the same as those who so badly need oral health care—is perhaps more important than it has ever been. As this report describes, there is already promising research completed and underway to better understand the role the oral cavity plays with regard to SARS-CoV-2 transmission and infection. Research, innovation, and new technologies must continue to shine light into the dark corners of this global public health crisis.

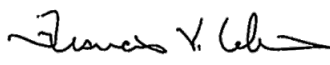
This report also sheds new light on how people in the United States experience oral health differently, based on their age, economic status, and a number of other social and commercial determinants. And, while good oral health is vitally important to the health and well-being of everyone, the report shows that oral health care has not been, and is not, equitably available across America.

Undoubtedly, you will see parallels to the 2000 report. As that document did, NIH, with the support of the Surgeon General, is also putting forth “calls to action” and specific recommendations on how to improve the oral health of our nation. In the following pages, we at the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, in concert with a vast array of editors and contributors, have painstakingly connected the dots that make up the constellation of amazing oral health research that has occurred since release of the first report at the turn of the century. With the utmost humility, the research team asked: “What have we learned?”

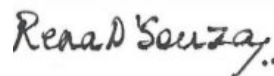
This report is their answer.



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