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MDAC
Maryland Dental Action Coalition

October 2026

WSSC Water Restores Fluoride Levels to Effective Amount

Fluoride addition supports public health and dental health



In April 2026, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) Water announced that it temporarily reduced fluoride levels from 0.7 mg/L to 0.4 mg/L at two Water Filtration Plants that provide drinking water to nearly 2 million customers in Montgomery and Prince George's counties. The reason cited by WSSC for the reduction was nationwide supply chain challenges.

On September 16, 2026, WSSC Water announced that it is restoring fluoride levels in the drinking water supplied to these two counties to approximately 0.7 milligrams per liter (mg/L), effective immediately. This level, pursuant to **September 2026 guidance issued by the Maryland Department of Health/Office of Oral Health**, aligns with the standard concentration of fluoride to maximize dental health benefits while minimizing the risk of dental fluorosis recommended by U.S. Public Health Service, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the American Dental Association .

Similarly, in April 2026, the Baltimore City Department of Public Works (DPW) announced a temporary reduction in fluoride levels in its drinking water system affecting the availability of a compound commonly used in water fluoridation. This reduction affects approximately 1.8 million people served by the City of Baltimore's public water system, including residents of Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. Unlike the WSSC, DPW has not yet restored fluoride levels to the recommended optimal concentration of 0.7 mg/L.

These supply constraints have been attributed to broader national supply chain disruptions, reportedly exacerbated by ongoing conflict in the Middle East, reduced domestic production, and limited output from key international suppliers.

Representatives from the Maryland State Dental Association, the Maryland Department of Health/Office of Oral Health, and the Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) have been meeting with appropriate officials to address the issue, which impacts millions of Maryland residents.

MDAC supports water fluoridation as the single most effective public health measure to prevent tooth decay. Since its introduction nearly 80 years ago, adjusting naturally occurring fluoride levels to the recommended standard set by the CDC has dramatically improved the oral health of tens of millions of Americans.

MDAC recognizes that along with an increase in local and national attention on the topic of water fluoridation, there has, unfortunately, been a rise in the amount of misleading information on the subject. MDAC is committed to ensuring our network of stakeholders has the resources and factual information needed to answer questions about fluoride. We have compiled a **list of resources** from national health and oral health organizations for our network to use.

What to learn more about national fluoride shortages?

The American Academy of Pediatrics' Campaign for Dental Health recently published **Key Facts on the 2026 Fluoride Shortage**, providing information about chemical availability, rising costs and resources for communities and health professionals.

Read the April 2026 Baltimore DPW Press Release.

Read the September 2026 WSSC Press Release.

MDAC Releases Updated Maryland Oral Health Plan

Third state plan builds on achievements; provides blueprint for continued progress



In the August e-newsletter, MDAC announced the release of the **Maryland Oral Health Plan 2026–2030 (MOHP)**, the state's five-year roadmap for improving oral health for all Marylanders.

Building on the progress made since Maryland's first statewide oral health plan was introduced in 2011, the updated MOHP identifies ongoing challenges and outlines strategies to expand access to oral health care, prevent oral disease and injury, and improve the overall health and well-being of Maryland residents. The Plan, produced in both a **digital version** with clickable links and a printed version, provides a framework for collective action across the state and includes **14 strategic goals** designed to be intentionally flexible, allowing communities and regions to develop innovative implementation strategies that reflect their unique needs and priorities.

The release of the updated MOHP marks an important milestone—and the beginning of the next chapter in advancing oral health across Maryland. **A new webpage** was added to

MDAC's website to promote the resource. The MOHP has also been posted on the MDH/OOH website. To date, the MOHP document has been downloaded 78 times from the MDAC website. On September 29, MDAC hosted a **MOHP Launch Webinar**. During the webinar, staff and MOHP Committee Chairs reviewed the purpose and development of the Plan, key findings, and the goals and strategies for the next five years. Staff also highlighted opportunities for stakeholders to participate in implementation. MDH/OOH Director Dr. Debony Hughes presented on the history of the MOHP, its purpose, and collaborative work of the department with partners statewide to support implementation. The webinar was attended by approximately 80 partners/stakeholders. After the event, MDAC shared webinar recording with 120 people registered for the event and made it available through MDAC's website.

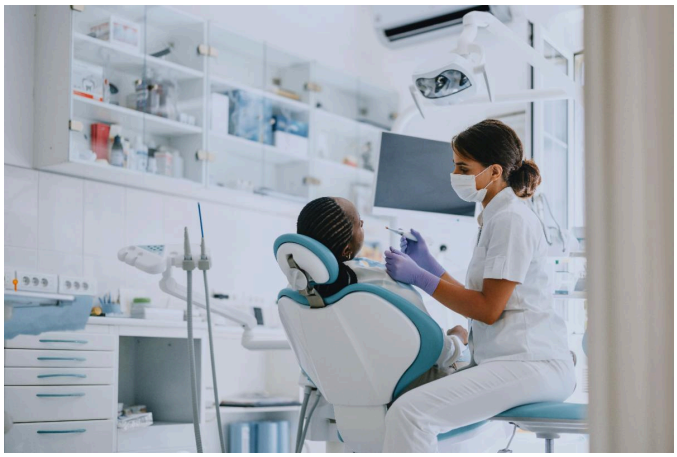
MDAC will work with stakeholders statewide to move the Plan from vision to action.

Download the Maryland Oral Health Plan, 2026-2030

Watch the MOHP Launch Webinar

Access and Dental Coverage Receives Bipartisan Support from Voters

CareQuest Institute for Oral Health study reveals voters want accessible, affordable care



Democrats and Republicans may disagree on a wide range of issues, but dental coverage and prioritizing oral health appear to be areas of bipartisan agreement, according to a U.S. poll conducted by the CareQuest Institute of Oral Health.

The survey also found that approximately 90% of Americans support expanding access to oral healthcare for older adults, veterans, and people with disabilities, according to a **CareQuest press release** dated October 14.

"These findings demonstrate that Americans across the political spectrum recognize oral health as an important health care issue," said Wade Rakes, CEO of CareQuest, in the release. "Voters want dental care to be more accessible and affordable, especially for people that face significant barriers. This sends a powerful message that oral health should be part of the national dialogue around health care access and affordability."

To examine public opinion on oral health policies, CareQuest Institute partnered with Marketing for Change to conduct a mixed-methods study. The research included focus groups and an online discussion board involving 50 persuadable voters in competitive congressional districts, as well as an online survey of 1,027 U.S. adults.

The findings showed that nine in 10 respondents support including dental coverage under Medicare. Support extended across party lines, with 96% of Democrats, 86% of

Republicans, and 92% of independents favoring the measure. Respondents cited fairness as a key consideration, noting that workers contribute to Medicare throughout their working lives and should therefore have access to dental benefits through the program.

Support was similarly strong for expanding dental coverage for veterans. According to the press release, 96% of Democrats and 90% of Republicans favored improving dental benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

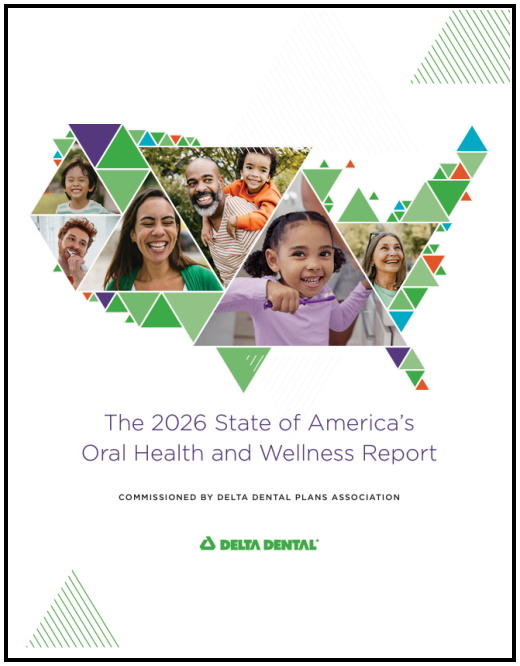
Respondents also indicated that strengthening dental coverage through Medicare, Medicaid, and the VA could expand healthcare options for Americans. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of preventive oral healthcare, recognizing that addressing dental problems early can help prevent more serious and costly conditions.
In summary, the importance survey participants place on the issue is clear:

- 78% consider the lack of dental coverage in Medicare a “crisis” or “major problem.”
- Approximately two-thirds of voters “love” the reform, including about half of Republicans.
- Opposition is limited: among the few voters who do not express support, most are undecided or have no opinion rather than actively opposed.
- Voters largely believe that workers have paid into Medicare throughout their adult lives, and it is only fair that Medicare covers dental care.

Read the CareQuest Institute full report and findings.

2026 State of America’s Oral Health Report

Survey data reveal encouraging oral health attitudes and habits among adults and children



Delta Dental recently released its annual *State of America’s Oral Health and Wellness Report*, featuring findings from a survey of 1,000 U.S. adults and 1,000 parents of children under age 12. The results underscore the importance of oral health literacy and education programs and positive impact on oral health behaviors and practices, one of three areas of priority focus in the updated Maryland Oral Health Plan, 2026-2030.

Nearly 75% of adults surveyed reported brushing twice a day and flossing daily. Interestingly, younger adults were more likely than older adults to follow both habits, suggesting a positive trend for the future of oral health. Awareness of the connection between oral health and overall wellness is also growing, with 90% of respondents recognizing that preventive dental exams are just as important as annual physicals.
Children’s oral hygiene habits show encouraging progress, too, although there is still room for improvement. According to the report, 75% of children brush twice daily, while 64% floss every day.

However, the findings also highlight some concerns. Two-thirds (67%) of parents surveyed worried that their children’s dental problems could negatively affect their confidence.

Meanwhile, 55% of adults admitted they do not replace their toothbrushes every three months as recommended, and 46% wait until the bristles are visibly worn before getting a new one.

Overall, the report highlights meaningful progress in oral health awareness and daily hygiene habits, while underscoring the continued need for education and preventive care.

Read the State of America's Oral Health and Wellness Report

Action for Dental Health Act: Passes in the House; Introduced in Senate

Bills address grants to support dental workforce shortages

The **Action for Dental Health Act (HR 2001)** would reauthorize the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Grants to States to Support Oral Health Workforce Activities Program. The bill would authorize $15 million annually for fiscal years (FY) 2026 through 2030, with funds remaining available until expended. Similarly, **S 5099**, a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to reauthorize the grant program, would authorize funding from FY 2027 through 2031, with funds also remaining available until expended. Both bills replace the previous authorization of $13.9 million annually for FY 2019 through 2023.

The program provides grants to states to develop and implement innovative strategies to address dental workforce shortages in designated dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs). To qualify for funding, states must provide nonfederal contributions equal to at least 40% of the federal funds awarded.

Under Section 340G of the Public Health Service Act, eligible uses of grant funding include:

- Recruiting and retaining dental students.
- Providing loan forgiveness and repayment assistance to dentists serving in shortage areas.
- Supporting dentists who participate in Medicaid.
- Establishing and supporting community-based and mobile dental facilities.
- Developing dental homes for children and adults, including older adults and individuals with disabilities.
- Reducing the inappropriate use of emergency departments for dental care.
- Supporting the placement of dental students and residents.
- Expanding access to teledentistry.
- Implementing community-based prevention programs.
- Supporting other activities deemed appropriate by the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

U.S. Representatives Robin Kelly (D-IL) and Mike Simpson (R-ID) introduced H.R. 2001 in the House of Representatives. The bipartisan bill passed the House by voice vote under suspension of the rules on July 20, 2026. On July 23, 2026, U.S. Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Ted Budd (R-NC) introduced the legislation in the Senate.

Job Opening: General Dentist, Harford County Health Department

Part-time (1 – 3 days per week)

This position contributes to the successful operation of the Harford County Health Department Dental Clinic by providing professional, friendly, and high-quality dental care for adults, pregnant women, and children who receive Medical Assistance. Interested candidates can submit their application to HR Manager, Kim Houck, at **kimberly.houck1@maryland.gov**.

Please help spread the word about this opportunity!

Read the full job description here.

The following article was submitted by the Maryland Department of Health Office of Oral Health.

Maryland
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

OOH Expands Dental Career Pipeline Program



To address workforce shortages in Maryland's Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), the Office of Oral Health (OOH) launched the HRSA-funded Pathways to Bright Futures (PBF) program in 2022. This educational pipeline sparks high school students' interest in dental careers through direct educational outreach, social media, hands-on symposia, scholarships, and clinical shadowing.

Evaluation from the program's first three years reveal significant gains in student awareness and interest in dental careers. Key drivers of career interest include a commitment to community service, hands-on clinical simulations, and real-world shadowing experiences.

Funded by a new five-year HRSA grant, OOH is building on these insights by expanding PBF into a regionally centered, technology-enabled, mentor-driven model. This next phase introduces Regional Hubs located in Dental HPSAs to guide students, Digital Passports to enrich the PBF experience and track student progress, enhanced scholarships, and expanded mentorship opportunities—all designed to transform interest into admission to dental education programs and eventual practice in Maryland's underserved communities.

Veterans Day. Wednesday, November 11, 2026

"In 2026, the VA reported that 74% of Veterans Health Administration (VHA) beneficiaries are not eligible for

dental care coverage.

That means nearly 7 million veterans who are eligible for other primary care through the VHA aren't getting dental care."

American Institute on Disparities in Public Health and CareQuest Institute for Oral Health
The Oral Health of Veterans Living in Maryland

NEWS & RESOURCES

Access to Care

New National Poll Shows Overwhelming Bipartisan Support for Dental Coverage

The Oral Health of Veterans Living in Maryland

Fluoride

Water Fluoride Shortage in Shreveport Poses Dental Risks

Campaign for Dental Health

Maternal and Child Oral Health

Scheduling Dental Care During Prenatal Visits Bolsters Oral Health Care During Pregnancy

Medicaid

As Medicaid Budgets Tighten, What Happens to Adult Dental Benefits?

Early Data Indicate Nebraska Medicaid Work Requirements Lead to Significant Enrollment Losses

Oral Health/Systemic Health

Severe Gum Disease May be Linked to Increased Stroke Risk

Oral Health Integration

RESOURCE: Provider Enrollment Flyer

To learn how Maryland dental providers can enroll in the Maryland Healthy Smiles Dental Program and resources provided, **review this enrollment flyer** and share with others!

Legislative Contacts

U.S. Senators (MD)

U.S. Representatives (MD)

Maryland State Legislators

Meetings/ Events/ Webinars

National Association of Community Health Centers
Partners Conference
November 16-18, 2026
Loews Kansas City Hotel
Kansas City, MO

2026 Public Health Learning Forum (virtual)
Building Bridges: Public Trust and Policy Engagement in Public Health
Public Health Foundation
November 16-19, 2026

[MHREF Secures Second Grant for Pilot Program Integrating Oral Health into Hospital Care Teams]

Rural Health Transformation Fund

[Maryland's Rural Health Transformation Program]

[Increasing Access to Rural Behavioral Health Care Through a Community-Based Workforce]

Workforce

[ADA Announces A Collaboration on Dental Hygiene Licensure]

[Dr. Jonathan Burke Selected As Director of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research]

[Families USA Health Action Conference
January 21-22, 2027
Capital Hilton
Washington, DC]

[National Association of Community Health Centers
Policy & Issues Forum
February 8-11, 2027
Gaylord National Harbor
Washington, DC]

[American Dental Education Association Annual Session & Exhibition
Vision Elevated, Impact Amplified
March 13-16, 2027
Chicago, IL]

[National Oral Health Conference
April 10-14, 2027
Hyatt Regency St. Louis at The Arch
St. Louis, MO]



Join us! To become an MDAC member, [click here.]

CONTACT

Do you have events or announcements you'd like to share? Contact MDAC, and we'll make every effort to include them in our next newsletter, as space permits.

JOIN

MDAC is statewide coalition of clinical care providers, governments, non-profits, academic institutions, managed care organizations, foundations and associations working collaboratively to improve the health of all Marylanders through increased oral health promotion,

Contact MDAC

disease prevention, education, advocacy and access to oral health care.

Join MDAC

www.mdac.us

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