North Dakota is home to four safety-net dental clinics. Safety net clinics are most often nonprofit, community-sponsored dental clinics that see patients who are low-income or uninsured or who do not have other access to dental care. The clinics typically see patients covered by Medicaid and offer sliding fee schedules or reduced fees.

Bridging the Dental Gap is a nonprofit clinic serving people within a 50-mile radius of the Bismarck-Mandan area. The clinic employs four dentists, two hygienists, four assistants, two office employees and one director. Opening in August 2004, the clinic typically serves 500 or more patients per month and is hoping to increase the numbers as one new dentist and one new assistant begin work in June. Services available at the clinic include exams, cleanings, sealants, fluoride applications, x-rays, fillings and extractions. Dentures, partials, root canals and oral surgery are also provided, but at a 50 percent discount.

According to Marcia Olson, director of the clinic, “Bridging the Dental Gap provides a dental home for those who have had no regular access to dental services. Many of our patients have lived with tooth pain that has impacted their ability to work and function. Just being able to provide relief affects their lives and touches ours. Many times, the thanks are overwhelming.”

Family Healthcare Center Dental Clinic is a federally qualified community health center located in Fargo that serves people in the Red River Valley Region of both North Dakota and Minnesota. The clinic was started in 1995 and typically fills about 280 appointments per month, completing basic services like emergency care, exams, cleanings, sealants, fluoride applications, x-rays, fillings and extractions. The clinic employs one dentist, one hygienist, one dental assistant, one receptionist and one director.

Valley Community Health Centers Dental Clinic is another federally qualified community health center. It was formed in 2007, is located in Grand Forks and serves people in the Northern Red River Valley region, providing exams, cleanings, sealants, fluoride applications, fillings and extractions. They employ two dentists, one and a half hygienists, four assistants and one office employee. Between the dentists and hygienists, they serve nearly 600 patients per month.

Northland Community Health Center – Dental Clinic is North Dakota’s newest safety net clinic, opening in January 2010 in Turtle Lake. It is part of a federally qualified community health center and serves people in central North Dakota. The clinic offers exams, cleanings, x-rays, fillings and extractions. One dentist provides services, along with one hygienist and three assistants. The clinic is currently recruiting another dentist and is planning to add another hygienist.

Kimberlie Yineman, director of the North Dakota Department of Health’s Oral Health Program, believes the safety net dental clinics are helpful in filling the gap for people without the ability to pay or without access to dental care.

Yineman said, “North Dakota is very fortunate to have these clinics and we are so appreciative to all the professionals involved. They provide an essential service to the underserved populations of North Dakota, helping them meet their oral health care needs.”
At its February 2010 meeting, the North Dakota Oral Health Coalition received updates on the following topics:

**Obtaining 501(c)3 status**

Tara Lacher, founder of My Pink Scarf, talked to the coalition about her charity, which gives pink scarves to cancer victims. She reviewed the steps she went through in order for her charity to become a 501(c)3 organization. The coalition voted to proceed with the 501(c)3 process, and Ms. Lacher offered to help with any questions or concerns that come up along the way.

**Southwest Area Safety Net Dental Clinic**

A meeting was planned in Dickinson to discuss the possibility of forming a southwest area safety net dental clinic. Many area professionals and residents who might be interested in helping get the project rolling were expected to attend.

To view complete meeting minutes, go to www.ndhealth.gov/oralhealth/Coalition.htm.

**Give Kids A Smile Day events provide relief for children**

Oral health professionals from across North Dakota donated their time, equipment and supplies to provide free dental care to kids during the annual Give Kids A Smile Day events in February. The events provide education, preventative and restorative care to children from low-income families.

A total of 155 children were served at five locations, and more than $60,000 worth of dental services were provided for free. Events were held at Dakota Family Dentistry and Nelson Family Dental, Bismarck; Ideal Image Dentistry, Mandan; Valley Community Health Centers, Grand Forks; and North Dakota State College of Science, Wahpeton.

Preventative services provided included exams, cleanings, x-rays, fluoride treatments, dental sealants and oral hygiene instruction. Some children received restorative care at the event, and some were referred to other dentists who continued their care with free fillings and extractions.

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**A dangerous correlation: eating disorders and oral health**

*By Troy Roness, Former Oral Health Coalition Coordinator*

Eating disorders have severe consequences for teeth and oral health. For example, self-induced vomiting associated with bulimia nervosa essentially can cause a breakdown of tooth structure. Because the digestive system releases powerful acids that break down food, self-induced vomiting allows these acids to come into contact with, attack and wear-away tooth enamel during regurgitation. In addition to causing gum disease and the erosion of enamel, frequent vomiting also may alter the color, length and shape of the teeth.

Society generally perceives bulimia nervosa as the only eating disorder that contributes to poor oral health, when in fact, anorexia nervosa is just as detrimental. Semi-starvation deprives the body of the nutrients it needs.

Individuals with eating disorders may experience a wide range of symptoms associated with their illness, including tenderness of the mouth and throat and swollen salivary glands. Swollen salivary glands may result in the widening of and a square-like shape of the jaw. Anorexia sufferers may experience weakening of the jaw bone resulting from osteoporosis, which also weakens teeth and leads to tooth loss.

Because of the devastating effect eating disorders can have on the teeth and oral health, no tooth restoration(s) should be pursued until the person has undergone treatment to overcome the disorder. In the interim, several steps can be taken to lessen the effects of the acid on teeth and gums during recovery, including limiting acidic or sugary foods and brushing and flossing on a regular basis.

Eating disorder numbers are definitely on the rise. Dentists and oral health professionals are often the first to encounter the symptoms of an eating disorder.

For more information about the dental complications of eating disorders, view the fact sheet at www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/uploads/file/information-resources/Dental%20Complications%20of%20EDs(1).pdf. The fact sheet provides information, resources and steps for oral health practitioners who want to discuss concerns with their patients and offer suggestions for treatment.
Seal! ND event conducted at Bridging the Dental Gap

A Seal! ND pilot program event was held at Bridging the Dental Gap in Bismarck in February. The clinic staff provided screenings and dental sealants to 21 third-grade students from Bismarck’s Jeannette Myhre Elementary School. The students were bused to the clinic, and those who needed them had sealants applied to their 6-year molars. The students also received a packet to take home that included a toothbrush, literature for the parents and the results of the clinical visit.

Bridging the Dental Gap will continue the free dental sealant program, offering a day of services during each quarter. Their service area encompasses towns and rural areas within a 50-mile radius of Bismarck, so schools within that range will be the ones to receive services.

(Top) Staff members of Bridging the Dental Gap who donated a day to provide screenings and dental sealants to 21 third-grade students. (Right) A student receives a screening and a dental sealant.

A fact sheet for parents about dental sealants and Tips For Healthy Teeth fact sheets for ages birth to 21 years are available for use in dental offices. To print these fact sheets, go to www.ndhealth.gov/oralhealth and click Fact Sheets and Brochures.

North Dakota Regional Public Health Hygienists

Section 1 (Northwest Area)
Tracey Haugenoe, R.D.H.
701.774.8708

Section 3 (Northeast Area) and Section 7 (Southeast Area)
Hollie Harrington, R.D.H., B.S.
701.683.9072

Section 4 (Southwest Area)
Carla Kelly, R.D.H.
701.523.3423

Section 2 (North Central Area) and Section 5 (Southwest Central Area) and Section 6 (South Central Area)
Marlene Hulm, R.D.H.
701.663.7962
Join the North Dakota Oral Health Coalition

The North Dakota Oral Health Coalition (NDOHC) represents public, private and nonprofit organizations and individuals interested in developing and promoting innovative strategies to achieve optimal oral health for all North Dakotans.

If you are interested in joining the coalition, complete and mail the application below, call 701.328.2356 or 800.472.2286 (press 1), or send an e-mail to cebach@nd.gov.

The next coalition meeting will be Sept. 10, 2010, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at the Gold Seal Building in Bismarck.

North Dakota Oral Health Coalition Membership Application

Name: ________________________________
Title: ________________________________
Organization: __________________________
Mailing Address: _________________________
City, State, Zip: _________________________
Telephone: _____________________________
E-mail Address: _________________________

Send to: North Dakota Oral Health Coalition, North Dakota Department of Health, 600 E. Boulevard Ave., Dept. 301, Bismarck, N.D. 58505-0200.