



## Promoting Better Oral Health Through a Statewide Coalition

### Public Health Problem

Although prevention and treatment for oral disease have improved significantly over the past 50 years, thousands of people in Illinois continue to experience dental pain and dysfunction. Illinois mirrors the nation in that oral disease remains pervasive among some populations, and cavities continue to be a major problem for some children. The Project Smile statewide survey, conducted in 1994, revealed that 38% of children aged 6–8 years in the state had untreated cavities, and the figure was even higher in the Chicago area, where 54% of children had untreated decay. Only 29% of Hispanic and 40% of black children aged 8–12 years were free of obvious decay, compared with 52% of white children.

### Program Example

Illinois communities have been assessing their oral health needs since the late 1990s and have used this information in local planning efforts. These community assessments have provided a growing database of information about disparities in oral health, challenges that block access to care, and actions that could improve oral health at the community level. One direct outcome of these efforts was the formation of the IFLOSS Coalition, a community collaborative with more than 50 member organizations whose mission is to improve oral health for Illinois residents. Since its formation in 1998, this grassroots coalition has continued to flourish. The IFLOSS Coalition has played a key role in the 2001 Illinois Oral Health Summit and the subsequent development of the state oral health plan, *Roadmap to the Future: Oral Health in Illinois*. Town hall meetings about the plan were held in 7 communities across the state, and the plan incorporates input from more than 300 stakeholders. The Roadmap addresses the five policy goals contained in the Surgeon General's 2000 report, *Oral Health in America*, as well as state priorities for improving oral health. A 5-year cooperative agreement with CDC is allowing Illinois to conduct some of the activities called for in the oral health plan.

### Implications and Impact

A broad-based, state coalition such as the IFLOSS Coalition can support and strengthen statewide planning efforts to promote oral health. The oral health plan developed for Illinois can be used as a framework for eliminating oral health disparities and improving oral health. A strong planning process can attract other related state and community coalitions to incorporate a focus on oral health (e.g., diabetes or tobacco control coalitions). With key partners and an oral health plan now in place, the Illinois Division of Oral Health is prepared to lead efforts to develop oral health infrastructure in the state and provide a model for other states and territories.