**Message:** Support oral (dental) health for all Nevadans

Dear Decision Maker**:**

As your Constituent and someone who values oral health, I urge you to protect Nevada residents’ oral health by:

1. Funding leadership and programs for the Nevada Oral Health Program in the state’s 2015 and 2016 budget; and
2. Authorizing the Nevada Department of Health Care Financing and Policy to expand covered dental services for our adult residents served by Medicaid.

Oral health is an integral part of total health and wellness. Unfortunately, almost everyone has oral diseases. Access to prevention and treatment is not available for the neediest Nevada residents – those that are low income, as well as the chronically ill and old; and it is these residents who suffer the most severe consequences.

There is a social and economic impact to oral disease; they affect nutrition, digestion, speech, self-image, self-esteem, quality of life and employability. In fact, more than 164 million work hours and productivity are lost by employed individuals as a result of a dental visit or problem.

The number of dental-related hospital emergency room visits in 2013, cost Nevadans over **$12 million**, with no long-term treatment provided and with our most vulnerable residents continuing to experience pain and suffering. That equals wasteful spending! Currently, our state only provides for emergency dental care for Medicaid-eligible adults and that needs to change. **Expanding dental benefits to include prevention and treatment services is not only the right thing to do, it’s cost effective**. Why spend millions on emergency room visits when we could spend just dollars to fix the problem, while at the same time cost-sharing these expenses with the federal government?

In 2001, your predecessors enacted NRS 439.272 and NRS 439.279, creating State Dental Health Officer and State Public Health Dental Hygienist positions to serve as the oral health leadership for our state. Much to Nevadans’ detriment, these positions has never been funded and they remain unfilled today. Nevada needs oral health leadership to implement cost-effective prevention programs and address the variety of dental needs and access barriers that too many Nevadans experience.

I urge you to support funding in our state budget for better oral health. Let me know that you believe *oral health matters in Nevada*.

Thank you for consideration of my comments. I look forward to hearing your position on this important public health issue.

Sincerely,

**(Include your name and complete Nevada address)**