Healthy Choices Coalition: Advocating for better oral health and overall health in Wisconsin
AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin • Alzheimer’s & Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin • Community Living Alliance • Independence First
• Rehabilitation for Wisconsin • Wisconsin Assisted Living Association
• Wisconsin Council on Children and Families • Wisconsin Dental Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Groups come together to form statewide Healthy Choices Coalition
to reduce barriers to dental care

Coalition members urge creative steps to improve Wisconsin’s oral and overall health

WEST ALLIS, WIS., Sept. 21, 2011 – The Wisconsin Dental Association today announced it has joined with seven other organizations to form the Healthy Choices Coalition, a group dedicated to helping reduce barriers to oral health care in the Badger State.

Coalition members – who represent more than 119,000 Wisconsinites and serve local families, children, individuals living with disabilities and illnesses, older adults and others – said they will work with state leaders to implement WDA’s Healthy Choices plan to ensure all have access to proper dental care.

“The health of its citizens is important to Wisconsin economically and socially, and good oral health is directly tied to good overall health,” said WDA President Dr. Eugene Shoemaker of Waukesha. “Yet thousands of children and adults in our state are suffering from untreated dental problems. The WDA has identified positive, viable ways to reduce the barriers to care these individuals face – ideas that can be effective even when state funding is tight.”

In addition to WDA and ARCW, members of the Healthy Choices Coalition include the following nonprofit groups:

- AIDS Resource Center of Wisconsin, one of the largest and most comprehensive AIDS service agencies in the country
- Alzheimer’s and Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin, which helps people with Alzheimer’s or related dementia in and around Madison
- Community Living Alliance, which provides support and health care services for people with disabilities in Dane County
- Independence First, which serves the needs of people with disabilities, primarily in metro Milwaukee
- Rehabilitation for Wisconsin, which helps people with disabilities and economic disadvantages throughout the state

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- Wisconsin Assisted Living Association, the state’s premier assisted living association that promotes standards of quality care and serves organizations that provide assisted living services to older adults.

- Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, a Madison group dedicated to improving conditions for the state’s families and youth.

“The member groups of the Healthy Choices Coalition serve a wide variety of individuals, illustrating how broadly barriers to dental care are felt in all corners of Wisconsin,” said Shoemaker. “With the support of policymakers and dedicated, well-respected groups like those in our Healthy Choices Coalition, we can find cost-effective, patient-focused solutions for the long term.”

The WDA Healthy Choices plan includes ideas to help close the gap between the number of low-income Wisconsinites who need dental care and their ability to easily access that care. This fall, WDA is working with a bipartisan group of lawmakers on two pieces of Healthy Choices legislation with minimal fiscal impact on the state budget.

One measure would allow doctors of oral health to delegate more procedures to educated and certified Expanded Function Dental Auxiliaries (dental hygienists or dental assistants) under their supervision, thereby increasing dentists’ ability to treat more people while maintaining quality of care.

The second would prohibit dental plans from setting fees for services not reimbursed by the dental plan, ensuring that treatment decisions would be made by patients and their dentists without third-party interference. Twenty-six states have already adopted similar legislation.

More information on WDA Healthy Choices and the Healthy Choices Coalition is available on the WDA.org website.

The Wisconsin Dental Association was established in 1870. With more than 3,000 members statewide, the WDA represents 88 percent of all licensed dentists in Wisconsin. WDA members are committed to promoting professional excellence and quality oral health care. The WDA is headquartered in West Allis and has a legislative office in Madison. It is one of 53 constituent (state-territorial) dental societies of the American Dental Association - the largest and oldest national dental association in the world. For more information on the WDA, call 414-276-4520, visit our WDA.org website or find us on Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and YouTube.

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