

EDITORIAL

Getting real on the dental healthcare front

We need to get real about dental healthcare in Portland and around the state. We see these problems every single week at Street Roots. It's mostly emergency circumstances that require a visit to the emergency room (ER). In many cases, individuals simply try to deal with the pain and agony.

Last year, the Pew Charitable Trust's Dental Campaign compiled a report on the cost to states as people go to the emergency room with dental health care problems, shifting the expense on Medicaid and other public programs. Their report estimates that preventable dental conditions were the primary reason for 830,590 ER visits by Americans in 2009 — a 16 percent increase from 2006. In 2010, according to the report, the number of dental-

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related emergency visits by Oregon's Medicaid enrollees was 31 percent higher than just two years before. That translates into tens of millions of dollars in emergency room charges.

According to a 2010 study by the Oregon Department of Human Services, 20 percent of children had significant tooth decay in seven or more of their teeth. And a 2006 report by the same department found that 16,000 school hours are lost in Oregon due to dental pain in students and emergency visits to the dentist.

The statistics about the consequences for Oregonians with bad dental care go on and on. Street Roots has advocated for more than a decade through our news pages about the need for a more robust dental strategy in our region and state.

We're headed in the right direction. With the opening of the Multnomah County dental clinic in Old Town we're one step closer to being able to get at the root of the problem. We know that with the changing healthcare environment that we'll have more opportunities in the future to serve a range of individuals that don't currently have access.

Putting fluoride in the water to treat tooth decay and to support dental health is a no-brainer. The idea that we shouldn't put fluoride in our water is simply ridiculous. We don't believe for one second that the City of Portland and a broad base of community health organizations would work against the public's best interest when it comes to putting fluoride in our water. Having the evidence to support the fluoride issue doesn't hurt either.

We have the opportunity to do great things on the healthcare front in our community. The decisions we make today will have a lasting impact for generations to come. There's no better time than the present. Street Roots believes a more healthy community and is a more just community. We're getting there little by little.

We are all part of Portland's safety net

The city is faced with having to ensure that basic services for the safety net continue at a time of great need. The

city faces a \$25 million dollar budget gap. The feds continue to cut services for the elderly and people experiencing poverty.

The services that are on the chopping block at the city are many — ranging from winter shelter and men's

shelter to rent assistance. That's not all; the list goes on and on with important services that provide a critical role in holding together an already vulnerable system — needle exchange, information and referral programs, etc., etc.

The question that always comes back to our group from local officials and bureaucrats is, "What would you prioritize and what would you cut if you had a choice?"

Is shelter more important than rent assistance? Does minority home ownership matter more than outreach workers for the mentally ill? Would you cut the Rose City Resource Guide or foreclosure programs?

We believe none of these important programs should be cut, period. The city should work towards saving nearly \$2 million dollars in life saving services for our community. Since the recession, we've seen a rise in poverty on an overwhelming scale. We've watched while local, state and federal budgets have decreased funds for these

programs year after year. Scores of people have died on our streets, literally. An already vulnerable system hangs in the balance.

It's during times like these that new and creative ways of thinking about creating resources emerge. Local businesses, the faith based community and non profits find new and innovative ways of delivering services and information.

Elected officials have the opportunity to lead and to support the larger community at a time when more and more people have a growing mistrust of how government plays a role in the everyday lives of its citizens.

We know that providing resources for these programs will not only save the taxpayers money and avoid costly system failures down the road, but that it also the right thing to do.

We need Street Roots readers more than ever to make their voices heard. We are launching a campaign in partnership with a wide range of service providers and local citizens to help ensure that basic services are funded. The campaign is called We Are the Safety Net.

You will find ways to get involved through Street Roots and social media and by visiting www.wearethesafetynet.org.

We hope you will take the time to contact city officials to voice your concern. We're hoping your will talk to your family and friends and find creative ways to support the We Are The Safety Net through social media. We're hoping you will let your voices be heard.



DIRECTOR'S DESK

By Israel Bayer

Israel Bayer is the executive director of Street Roots. You can reach him at israel@streetroots.org or follow him on Twitter @israelbayer.



A 66-year-old elderly woman sleeps in a doorway in downtown Portland. She told Street Roots she has been homeless for nearly three months.

BY ISRAEL BAYER

Our mission

Street Roots creates income opportunities for people experiencing homelessness and poverty by producing a newspaper and other media that are catalysts for individual and social change.

Street Roots publishes every two weeks, launching on Fridays, and is available exclusively through our street vendors or by subscription. We are proud members of the North American Street Newspaper Association and the International Network of Street Papers.

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Street Roots Rose City Resource

Street Roots publishes the Rose City Resource, a comprehensive booklet of services for people experiencing homelessness and poverty. To inquire about getting an order of the Rose City Resource for distribution, please write to pdxrosecityresource@gmail.com. Resources are also available online at www.rosecityresource.org.

Vendors

Street Roots vendors buy the newspapers for 25 cents each and sell them for \$1, keeping the 75 cents in profit for themselves. In order to keep the cost low to our vendors, we receive additional support from donations and in-kind contributions.



75¢
goes directly to the vendor who sold you the paper

25¢
goes toward printing costs

Vendor orientations are at 1 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the Street Roots office.