

Benefits

continued from page 1

million treating Washington children for dental disease, according to DSHS. Currently, "almost 40 percent of the state's children start kindergarten with tooth decay, and nearly 14 percent of all kindergarten children have untreated tooth decay," according to the Smile Survey 2010: The Oral Health of Washington's Children.

Also, a report from the National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center found that "painful dental disease can have long-lasting and damaging impacts on children's development. It can keep children out of school, disrupt their sleep, erode their self-esteem and make it harder for them to pay attention and learn in the classroom. It also can lead to a lifetime of unhealthy adult teeth and expensive dental treatments."

"Pregnancy is one of the best times to address oral health because it is when mothers are most receptive to health messages that benefit themselves and their families, according to Riter. "It's also an important period because research suggests that poor oral health may affect blood pressure during pregnancy and birth outcomes, which can also increase Medicaid costs." Medicaid pays for nearly half of all births in Washington.

Dental disease can have long-lasting and damaging impacts on children's development

"Low-income pregnant women are more susceptible to dental disease and eliminating their care only means spending more public money in the coming years, when small problems these women couldn't get treated become emergencies and their children develop cavities that could have been easily prevented," said Dr. Martin Lieberman, dental director for NeighborCare Health, a provider of medical and dental care for low-income people in Seattle. "If they eliminate this cost-effective care, legislators will be penny wise and pound foolish."

Investing in prenatal dental care helps control Medicaid costs among low-income families, Riter said, who are at a higher risk for dental problems in ways that also include fewer emergency room visits from uninsured patients who need medical attention due to dental issues.

Research also shows that dental costs are nearly half for Medicaid-insured children who visit the dentist by the time they turn a year old, than for children who have their first visit between ages 4 and 5 (\$263 compared to \$546) according to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. "Children who receive early preventive care are less likely to need subsequent costly restorative

Mission of Mercy



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

The Oregon Dental Association Mission of Mercy brought 1900 volunteer dentists, hygienists and translators to the Oregon Convention Center Nov. 21-22. The mission provided free dental care to 2000 adults and children without dental insurance. Full story online at theskanner.com

or emergency visits," it said.

"Taking care of women's oral health during pregnancy results in healthier moms and children," said Dr. Russell Maier, Clinical Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Washington and Chair of the Washington Dental Service Foundation Board of Trustees. "Prevention improves health and saves money. That is why dental care for low-income pregnant

women must not be eliminated."

The special legislative session which will address nearly \$2 billion in budget shortfalls will begin Nov. 28 and can legally go on for 30 days.

Traci Tate is a student in the University of Washington Department of Communication News Laboratory.

Treatment

continued from page 1

ing, child welfare and addictions treatment. But don't expect any changes in the legal status of drugs.

"The president is very clear that he opposes legalization and he opposes decriminalization," Kerlikowske said. "But he has clearly instructed us to use a science-based approach."

The highest rate of illicit drug use is among 18 to 22-year-olds with more than one in five using some substance. The most commonly used illegal substance is marijuana, with 17.4 million users, followed by prescription drugs with 7 million non-prescribed users. Almost 52 percent of U.S. adults, 131 million people, drink alcohol.

The high numbers of people who use some kind of drug recreationally translates into considerable opposition to drug control. That's reflected in the music we listen to, the comedians we laugh at, and the movies we watch. Even President Obama has admitted to smoking pot and snorting a few lines of coke in high school. And President George W. Bush got a DUI, admitted to a drinking problem, and has been accused of covering up an alleged 1972 cocaine pos-

session arrest.

To make a dent in those numbers, the Obama administration is putting its weight behind prevention and treatment. Last year's budget allocated \$10.4 billion for drug prevention and treatment programs compared to \$9.2 billion for drug enforcement. Whether treatment overall is expanding or not is questionable, since the economy has seen state budgets for treatment being pared to the bone.

Redonna K. Chandler MD, a top researcher at the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA), said only 7.6 percent of the 5 million adults who need treatment for substance abuse receive that help. In prison, large percentages of inmates need treatment but only 21 percent get any services.

"Treatment is necessary to try to alleviate the connection between drug abuse and crime. We know that lengthy terms of incarceration and boot camp without treatment, have not been effective, because they don't get at the underlying root causes of addiction disorders. We also know that lengthy periods of incarceration where people are forced to abstain from drugs is no substitute for treatment."

When prisoners do receive treatment, it needs to be followed up with treatment in the community after release, Chandler said. One program in Delaware showed 70 percent of former prisoners who received comprehensive treatment services remained arrest free, compared to 30 percent of those who had no treatment.

Kerlikowske said drug abuse and addiction damages health, destroys families and drives crime, as well as costing us \$193 billion annually in lost productivity, health problems and incarceration. The cost for the criminal justice system alone is \$56 billion.

Mandatory minimum laws passed in many states have made reducing those numbers difficult, even though prevention and treatment have proved to be cheaper and more effective, he said.

"Particularly with addiction, putting someone away for a longer period has no benefits,"

Recent changes in law and policy will help reduce the disproportionate impact on African American and Latino communities, the former Seattle police chief said, pointing to last year's Fair Sentencing Act, which removed some of the extra penalties for crack users. Crack users used to be subject to sentences 100 times more severe than powder cocaine users. Now, that sentencing differential has been

reduced to 18 -1.

Another key part of the new strategy is to push for states to fund more drug courts. Drug courts are far cheaper than incarceration, and have demonstrated success. The evidence shows that treatment works no matter whether it is chosen or court ordered.

Kerlikowske also highlighted the Second Chance Act, saying it will improve success rates for felons returning to the community. The law supports funding for re-entry programs such as: substance abuse treatment; family programs, mentoring and employment programs. As a result, the Department of Justice last year awarded \$183 million in grants for 296 state and local reentry programs. Felons face too many barriers and too much stigma, he said.

Treatment is necessary to try to alleviate the connection between drug abuse and crime

"These are things we have got to break down because if we don't make it easier for people to reenter then they will end up back in the corrections system," he said.

Attorney General Holder recently wrote to state attorneys general asking them to review state laws for barriers to re-entry. And Housing and Urban Development Sec. Sean Donovan wrote to local housing authorities to clarify the rules on housing felons.

Contrary to widespread myth, many felons could be offered public housing. Confusion over the law has led some housing authorities to deny all felons. In fact, only felons convicted of manufacturing methamphetamines and registered sex offenders are barred by law from public housing.

The goals of Kerlikowske's five-year plan include, reducing youth substance use and drug deaths by 15 percent and reducing drugged driving by 10 percent. Tools to achieve these goals include early intervention programs run by healthcare workers, diversion programs for non-violent drug offenders and expanded access to treatment.

The National Drug Control Strategy for 2011 says, for

DRUGS AND CRIME

Number of people incarcerated: 2 million

Number on probation or parole: 5 million

More than 50 percent of state and Federal inmates used drugs during the month before committing their offense

Nearly 33 percent of state prisoners and a 25 percent of federal prisoners were using drugs at the time of the offense

FAMILIES

Parental substance abuse is the main reason given for children being removed from their homes in 33 percent of cases involving babies under one year

For children ages 2 to 8 that's true in 25 percent of cases.

HEALTH

In 2009 the Centers for Disease control tallied 24,263 from alcohol and 37,495 deaths from drugs (although the figures don't distinguish between legal and illegal drug use)

More than 10 percent of HIV infections come from IV drug use

See TREATMENT on page 8