



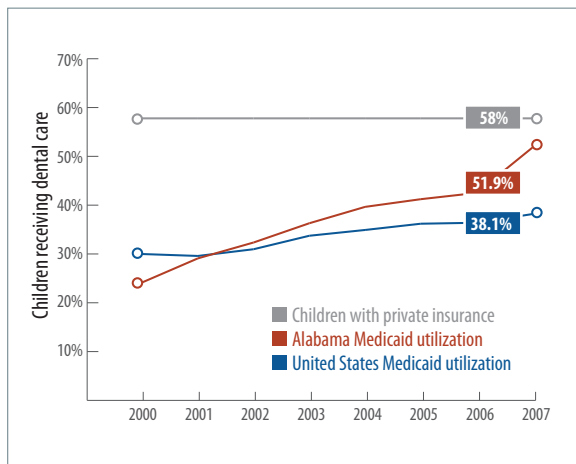
# The Cost of Delay: State Dental Policies Fail One in Five Children Alabama



**ALABAMA** meets just three of eight policy benchmarks aimed at addressing children's dental health needs. For example, the state has no organized school sealant program, is only one of seven states to require that dentists directly supervise dental hygienists in sealant programs, and does not submit data to the National Oral Health Surveillance System. One bright spot: The state's innovative Medicaid program, Smile Alabama!, has outperformed most of the nation. Alabama was third behind Vermont and Texas in the percentage of Medicaid-enrolled kids receiving dental care in 2007, the latest year for which data are available. In the early 2000s, the state raised Medicaid reimbursement rates to close to dentists' retail fees. While Alabama has not been able to deliver subsequent increases to keep pace with inflation, it has sustained existing payment rates despite the budget crisis.<sup>1</sup> And nearly 83 percent of Alabama's population on community water supplies has access to optimally fluoridated water.

## HOW BAD IS THE PROBLEM?

**TOO MANY CHILDREN LACK ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE, WITH SEVERE OUTCOMES.** One measure of the problem: 1 out of 2 children on Medicaid received no dental service in 2007.



SOURCES FOR NATIONAL BENCHMARKS: 1) Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors; 2) American Dental Hygienists' Association; 3) Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, CMS-416; 4) American Dental Association; 5) Pew Center on the States, National Academy for State Health Policy and American Academy of Pediatrics; 6) National Oral Health Surveillance System.

<sup>1</sup> Testimony of Mary McIntyre, medical director of the Alabama Medicaid Agency, Office of Clinical Standards and Quality, before the Domestic Policy Subcommittee, Oversight and Government Reform Committee, House of Representatives, October 7, 2009, <http://republicans.oversight.house.gov/images/stories/Hearings/pdfs/20091007McIntyre.pdf> (accessed December 16, 2009).

## HOW WELL IS ALABAMA RESPONDING?

MEASURED AGAINST THE NATIONAL BENCHMARK FOR EIGHT POLICY APPROACHES

|  | STATE    | NATIONAL | MEETS OR EXCEEDS |
|--|----------|----------|------------------|
| Share of high-risk schools with sealant programs, 2009               | <25%     | 25%      |                  |
| Hygienists can place sealants without dentist's prior exam, 2009     | N        | Y        |                  |
| Share of residents on fluoridated community water supplies, 2006     | 82.9%    | 75%      | ✓                |
| Share of Medicaid-enrolled children getting dental care, 2007        | 51.9%    | 38.1%    | ✓                |
| Share of dentists' median retail fees reimbursed by Medicaid, 2008   | 60.1%    | 60.5%    |                  |
| Pays medical providers for early preventive dental health care, 2009 | Y        | Y        | ✓                |
| Authorizes new primary care dental providers, 2009                   | N        | Y        |                  |
| Tracks data on children's dental health, 2009                        | N        | Y        |                  |
| <b>Total score</b>   | <b>D</b> |          | <b>3 of 8</b>    |

Grading: A = 6-8 points; B = 5 points; C = 4 points; D = 3 points; F = 0-2 points

Download the full report and explanatory notes by visiting [www.pewcenteronthestates.org/costofdelay](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/costofdelay).



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