# NEVADA GOVERNOR’S COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

## **DRAFT Position on Dental Care**

Good oral health is an important component of overall health and implies that teeth, gums, and oral mucosal tissues are intact and free of disease. Conversely, poor oral health may affect quality of life and a person’s ability to eat, sleep, and function without pain. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are more likely to experience challenges in accomplishing daily self-care activities such as maintaining good oral health. To achieve and maintain good oral health people with I/DD often require a special approach to dental care. Of the nearly 7.3 million adults with I/DD in America, nearly 4.5 million rely on Medicaid for health coverage. Medicaid does not uniformly provide adults with I/DD dental coverage and twelve states do not provide basic dental benefits (aside from limited waiver programs in seven of them). Moreover, there is a significant shortage of qualified, trained dental care professionals who are prepared and willing to treat them.

People with I/DD are at an increased risk for:

* Malocclusion, missing permanent teeth, delayed eruption, enamel hypoplasia, Oral trauma, and injury.
* Oral cavities for several reasons which include frequent use of medicine high in sugar, dependence on a caregiver for regular oral hygiene, reduced clearance of foods from the oral cavity, impaired salivary function, preference for carbohydrate-rich foods, a liquid or puréed diet, and oral aversions.
* Damaging oral habits including bruxism, mouth breathing, tongue thrust, self-injurious behavior (lip biting, gingival picking) and pica (the hunger for or ingestion of nonfood items).

The NGCDD believes that comprehensive health care must provide affordable dental coverage, improved quality, and better cost control, while addressing the significant oral health care disparities faced by individuals with developmental disabilities. In addition to improving access to quality dental care for persons with I/DD, the health care system must improve the way our State provides access to oral health care services, such as referrals to affordable and qualified medical professionals, education on preventative oral healthcare measures, and education to providers on providing services to people with I/DD.

### Policy Recommendations:

Comprehensive dental care must adequately address the following:

* Access to affordable oral care coverage for Nevadans with developmental disabilities, removing any bias based on pre-existing conditions, congenital impairments, or whether the intervention is preventative in nature.
* Assure greater access to quality care by dental care providers trained to meet the medical needs of individuals with developmental disabilities.
* Provide appropriate, accessible, and convenient dental care for individuals with developmental disabilities.
* Ensure all policies and programs result in the creation of equal treatment in dental care services to all individuals.
* Beginning in youth, encourage inclusion of individuals with I/DD in education, prevention, and wellness programs for dental care.
* Develop and strengthen the “medical home” model to meet the dental care needs of individuals with I/DD.
* Support the development and continuation of programs that provide education to dental care professionals on the needs of individuals with I/DD.