



Oral Health Project: Healthy Teeth Amendment Moves to Implementation

The 2015-16 New York State Budget enacted the *Healthy Teeth Amendment*, which includes two significant provisions to protect the oral health of New Yorkers. The first provision amends the NYS Public Health Law so that communities considering halting community water fluoridation will need to provide public notice and alert the New York State Department of Health. Water fluoridation decisions in New York State will continue to reside with local water districts, as per current policy. The second provision establishes a \$5 million Oral Health Fund to provide grants to communities to purchase, repair or upgrade fluoridation equipment.

Community water fluoridation (CWF) is the single most effective and least expensive way to reduce decay for both children and adults. CWF has been shown to reduce tooth decay by about 25% over a person's lifetime and the cost over that time is less than the price of one dental filling. Communities with fluoridated water have better oral health and spend fewer Medicaid dollars on oral health disease. A New York State study found that Medicaid-enrolled children in counties where fluoridated water was less accessible required 33% more fillings, root canals and tooth extractions than those in counties where more fluoridated water was available.

The *Healthy Teeth Amendment* is important for several reasons. First, the public deserves transparency; a community decision to halt water fluoridation impacts residents' access to a preventive dental health benefit. If fluoridation within a community is stopped, residents and the clinicians who care for them need time to determine alternative ways of protecting dental health, especially for children, in the form of fluoride supplements or other preventive measures. Second, communities face costs to purchase, upgrade and maintain equipment for local water systems. By offering grants, this amendment can reduce the need for communities to incur new expenses while continuing to offer a vital public health benefit.

Schuyler Center commends the Governor and the Legislature for recognizing the importance of the *Healthy Teeth Amendment's* provisions. We look forward to continuing to partner with the State to ensure the successful implementation of the provisions.

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