



in partnership with



2008 Presidential Candidates' Oral Health Survey

Senator John Edwards

Response to Oral Health America Questionnaire

1. Does your plan for health care reform and/ or expanded health insurance coverage include dental coverage? If yes, please describe any limitations on coverage. If no, please explain.

Yes, my plan for truly universal health care includes coverage for dental checkups and basic dental care.

2. Do you support dental coverage through a public plan, like Medicare, that has a predictable, guaranteed level of benefits that “cannot be taken away” or do you envision dental coverage that relies on private insurance companies to provide good dental coverage at a decent price for all Americans? Please explain.

Under my plan, the U.S. government will help states and groups of states create regional Health Care Markets, non-profit purchasing pools that offer a choice of competing insurance plans. At least one plan would be a national public program based upon Medicare. All plans will include comprehensive benefits, including dental health benefits.

Health Care Markets will offer a choice between private insurers and a public insurance plan modeled after Medicare, but separate and apart from it. Families and individuals will choose the plan that works best for them. This American solution will reward the sector that offers the best care at the best price.

3. Given that Medicaid dental benefits for adults are optional for state, and 50 percent of states offer no benefits or emergency-only benefits, how will you ensure that all adults, including individuals with disabilities and special needs, are able to access the dental care they need?

I will make dental benefits affordable for all Americans through the plans offered by Health Care Markets.

4. Who would not be eligible for dental coverage in your health care reform plan?

My plan covers all American citizens and legal residents.

5. How do you propose to finance your health care reform plan, including any dental coverage to be offered?

We need to be honest about the cost of universal health care. My plan costs \$90 billion to \$120 billion a year. I will pay for it by repealing President Bush's income tax cuts for Americans who make more than \$200,000 per year. Others may disagree, but I believe affordable, guaranteed health care for working people is more important than tax breaks for the wealthy. I also believe you can't say you have a serious plan for health care unless you have a plan to actually pay for it.

6. How would the level of health care benefits, including dental benefits, be determined in your health care reform plan?

Under the my plan for truly universal health care, everyone will have comprehensive health insurance that covers doctor and dentist visits, inpatient and outpatient care, prescription drugs, diagnostic services, and other needed care.

7. Given that the ratio of dentists per population is shrinking and many states face shortages of dentists and auxiliaries, do you support efforts to recruit and train more dental providers, including ethnically diverse providers, in underserved areas?

I support efforts to ensure that Americans across the country have access to the health care they need, and to promote diversity in the health care workforce. I am especially concerned about the lack of access to primary health care, including dental care, in rural areas. My health care plan calls for the establishment of a nationwide network of safety net clinics and public hospitals to meet health care needs in underserved rural areas.

8. Given that tooth decay is the most prevalent childhood disease and is largely preventable, how will you promote oral disease prevention measures?

I will maintain and improve funding for healthy lifestyle programs in schools. I will also form a national taskforce to address school nutrition guidelines that emphasize healthy food options for kids.

9. As a component of your health care reform platform, do you support some form of universal access to health care for all Americans.

Yes.

10. Do you support a dental mandate under the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)?

Yes.

11. Many children are income-ineligible for participation in the dental component offered by most states because they have current medical coverage. As solution that

has been proposed is to require SCHIP programs to offer “wraparound” dental coverage for these children. Do you support such coverage?

Yes.

12. The first baby boomers will reach Medicare age during the next presidential term, and most will find themselves without dental care because Medicare doesn't offer dental benefits. Do you support adding dental benefits to Medicare?

Yes.

Senator John Edwards' Statement:

I appreciate this opportunity to tell you exactly what I believe in my own words.

Dental care is an essential part of maintaining overall health. Researchers have shown that periodontal disease is linked to heart disease, some cancers and diabetes. Good oral health is crucial to living a full and productive life. Because our oral health affects the way we speak, eat, and smile, those without access to oral care can find themselves painfully disadvantaged in social and work settings. But obtaining oral health care remains out of reach of many-- oral health is directly linked to income, with the poorest Americans facing the most dental and oral health problems.

A little over a month ago, I met a man named James Lowe in Wise, Virginia. James spent the first fifty years of his life without a voice -- literally without a voice -- because he didn't have health care. All he needed was a simple operation to fix a cleft palate. It's outrageous that a working man in the richest country in the world could not speak for 50 years because he couldn't pay for a \$3,000 operation.

Forty-seven million Americans do not have health insurance. And even those who do have it are worried about how they're going to pay for it -- and whether it will be enough to pay their bills in the event of a crisis. Across the country, families as well as businesses are being squeezed by rising health care costs. Too many families are one major illness away from financial disaster.

To fix this crisis, we don't need an incremental shift, we need a fundamental change. We need truly universal health care. For more than 20 years, Democrats have talked about universal health care, but have gotten nowhere because the big insurance companies, drug companies and HMOs have spent millions to block real reform.

We need to end the game in Washington and build one America, with one health system where every American can get decent, affordable health care. I have a bold plan to stand up to the big drug and insurance companies and finally guarantee true universal health care while cutting costs for families and employers.

Under my plan, businesses will either cover their employees or help pay their premiums. The government will make insurance affordable through new tax credits and by leading the way toward more cost-effective care. New "Health Care Markets" will give families and businesses purchasing power and a choice of quality plans, including one public plan. Finally, once these steps have been taken, all American residents will be required to take responsibility and get insurance.

Families without insurance will get coverage at an affordable price, and families that have insurance will pay less and get more security and choices. Employers will find it

cheaper and easier to insure their workers. My plan will save an average family up to \$2,500 a year and eliminate \$130 billion of wasted health care spending each year.

My plan also makes the system more efficient. Today, thirty cents of every dollar spent on health care goes toward administration and system waste. I will require insurers to spend at least 85 percent of their premiums on patient care so insurance companies can't pocket the savings from reform instead of delivering more to patients.

It's time for a new era in chronic and preventive care. Helping patients and providers manage chronic illnesses and avoid unnecessary hospitalizations can improve health, while reducing health care costs. We can save lives and dollars by investing in technology, providing incentives for quality, reducing medical errors and creating a knowledge bank that makes doctors aware of preventable mistakes.

Now is the time for a new direction. With the courage to take on powerful interests and propose bold ideas, we can bring down health care costs for families and businesses and make sure every man, woman and child gets the care they need and deserve.