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### Study: Access to dental care lags in Minnesota

Submitted by news17 on March 2, 2010 - 7:59am.  
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By Laura Thornquist  
Minnesota News Connection

Minnesota gets a "C" on its dental policies for kids, according to a new national study.

A pediatric dentist says the study confirms what Minnesota dentists have been saying for years: The state is falling short in providing good dental health and access to care for disadvantaged children, especially in rural and low-income areas.

The study, by the Pew Center for the States, says Minnesota meets only four of eight policy measurements for quality care.

Dr. Robin Loewen, a pediatric dentist from Rochester, said the results come as no surprise. She believes improving dental health in Minnesota is a wise financial decision.

"Minnesota is actually doing well on half of the benchmarks that were proposed in the study, and the other benchmarks are things that can actually be accomplished," Loewen said. "Dental health care only comprises two percent of the overall health care spending in this country. This is not an unattainable goal."

Loewen says there are ways to address the lack of dentists who practice in rural and low-income areas, including tax incentives and student-loan forgiveness programs.

Three areas in which Minnesota scored well in the report are water fluoridation; the ability of dental assistants to put sealants on kids' teeth; and the state's policy of reimbursing medical providers for early preventive dental health care.

Loewen said the state pays dentists a very low rate to treat patients in government health programs, well below the national average.

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- It will be a work week like any other.

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