

## Introduction to Special Issue

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The state of Maryland has taken to heart the death of Deamonte Driver as a result of an untreated dental infection and the oral health challenges that tragedy has posed. The state has responded with actions based on evidence and lessons learned locally and nationally. However, Maryland is also a state that recognizes the need to make further improvements and the critical importance of continued vigilance. It is in this context that this special issue was conceived.

Drafts of the papers and commentaries presented here informed participants in the Maryland Oral Health Summit: Pathways to Common Ground and Action, held in October 2011. The Summit represented one of several approaches to aid the state's ongoing learning and quality improvement process as it acts to extend oral health for all Marylanders. The background provided by the papers and commentaries, together with the Summit events, provided a wider perspective on issues, a wealth of new information to consider, and a broader landscape of experiences and ideas. With these in hand, the Summit participants were better able to assess the past and present, and begin the hard work of planning the future. In this way, the Summit helped complete and refine the papers and commentaries as they appear in this Supplement.

The Maryland Summit and associated events reflected collaborative efforts, beginning with the partnership between the Maryland Dental Action Coalition and the Santa Fe Group. These two organizations were joined by a diverse gathering of public and private health groups and experts

representing state, local, and federal programs and academia. Thus, Summit participants were able to learn from individuals who have studied other states, those who monitor and practice at the national level, those in academia, research, industry, and private practice, and those in the third party payer world.

Accordingly, this special issue of the *JPHD* provides the basis for an expanding conversation about oral health at the state level. While the focus is on Maryland, news of yet another tragic death from oral health problems in Ohio means that what is said here can apply to any state. The papers are introduced by US Representative Elijah Cummings. As a champion for oral health, he has inspired each of us to extend our work to promote oral health for all. His remarks are followed by four articles prepared by individuals from the state health department and academia that provide the background in Maryland. These papers reflect strategic actions, speak to strengths and weaknesses, and highlight selected initiatives, such as an oral cancer prevention program and an oral health literacy campaign, which could be modeled by other states. The three subsequent papers provide perspectives from individuals knowledgeable about local issues and able to provide a national perspective and vision. Collectively, the papers let us learn from the experiences of other states, identify opportunities within existing federal legislation, and plan actions needed to enhance evidence-based practice. Complementing the papers are the commentaries from individuals from backgrounds within

and beyond dentistry. Their remarks offer a rich agenda for future action.

This special issue also should be viewed against the backdrop of the recommendations from the 2011 oral health Institute of Medicine reports, *Advancing Oral Health in America* and *Improving Access to Oral Health for Vulnerable and Underserved Populations*. What has been learned from the Maryland experience? What is needed to enhance the infrastructure and support of state oral health programs? How can oral health be integrated into primary care? We also rejoice in the recognition of “oral health” as one of the 12 Leading Health Indicators for Healthy People 2020. There is much opportunity for action and much work to be done.

We are grateful to Health Resources and Services Administration’s Maternal and Child Health Bureau for funding the special issue of the *JPHD* and to Katrina Holt and staff of the National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center for their assistance in the dissemination of it. We are grateful to the authors and commentators for their work and thoughtful remarks. We thank Robert Weyant for his continual and patient guidance and counsel.

This issue is dedicated to Captain John Rossetti and Deamonte Driver. Their lives and legacy have established the essential foundation for the work in Maryland and nationally. We are eternally grateful to them and to their families.