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### **Alaska gets national ‘A’ for improved Medicaid policies**

*Grade based partially on dental reimbursement rate and children’s oral protection*

ANCHORAGE — Alaska is one of seven states receiving an “A” on the children’s dental health report card from the Pew Center on the States — up from a “B” in the previous Pew report in February 2010.

The PEW Center on the States today released its updated state report card on policies related to children’s oral health. One reason for the improved grade in Alaska is the recent Medicaid program reimbursement of trained medical providers for preventive dental services for young children as part of their well child exams. Children from lower income families are typically at higher risk for development of dental decay.

The Pew Center is a division of the nonprofit Pew Charitable Trusts that identifies and advances effective solutions to critical issues facing states.

“It is great that Alaska received a nice grade on this report but there remains work to do,” said Brad Whistler, State Dental Officer. Dr. Whistler noted the state is losing ground on support for community water fluoridation in urban communities, and still more than half of all children enrolled in Medicaid/Denali KidCare do not get an annual dental visit.

Medicaid policies and performance measures were reflected in a number of the report’s measures. As compared with other state Medicaid programs, Alaska received high marks for dentist participation in the program.

“I am very pleased that Alaska’s grade reflects all our hard work on behalf of dental health for children,” Health and Social Services Commissioner William Streur said. “It confirms that the recent increases in Medicaid dental reimbursement are having a positive effect.”

Although reimbursement for dental procedures had not increased during the 1997–2007 period, the department worked with the Legislature to remedy the situation given increased concerns with dentist participation in the program and resulting in limited child access to dental care.

The grades are based on several benchmarks, including children’s dental health, which includes tracking data such as children’s tooth decay, use of sealants (plastic coatings placed on the biting surfaces of teeth to protect from developing dental decay) and water fluoridation.

An inventory of elementary schools conducted by the Alaska Oral Health Program on access to school-based or school-linked dental sealant programs found a high percentage have access to these services due to the Tribal dental programs. Alaska also received marks for conducting dental assessments and submission of information to the National Oral Health Surveillance System.

To access the 2011 Pew report, go to:

[http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/initiatives\\_detail.aspx?initiativeID=85899359680](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/initiatives_detail.aspx?initiativeID=85899359680).

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