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Contact: Don Cannalte 303-322-0244

Ned High 303-573-5464

Dental Coalition Launches Statewide Public Awareness Campaign

Denver -- Oral Health Awareness Colorado (OHAC), the coalition of federal, state and community organizations, has kicked off a statewide public awareness campaign to raise awareness of the importance oral health to whole health. Target audiences of the campaign include policy makers, oral health care providers, health care leaders, businesses, educators, the news media, and consumers.

The *Be a Smart Mouth* campaign will focus on the key oral health issues currently facing Coloradans. Emphasis will be placed on increasing the understanding of the importance of oral health to whole health. The campaign also will work to increase collaborative efforts throughout the state between public, private and non-profit partners who share an interest in optimal oral health.

Among the oral health concerns in the state:

- In Colorado, an estimated 7.8 million hours of school are lost annually due to oral pain. In the 2001-2002 school year, a survey of 2,400 third graders in 19 Colorado counties showed that 26 percent of the children had untreated decay.
- Pregnant women are not receiving appropriate information on the importance of good oral health. There is a strong relationship between the poor oral health of expectant mothers and pre-term low birth weight babies.
- Oral cancer five-year survival rates are less than breast, cervical and prostate cancers. Only 55 percent of oral cancer patients survive for five years.

- Over one million Coloradans, or nearly a quarter of the state's population, live in communities that have decided not to fluoridate their drinking water despite fluoridation being the most cost-effective preventive measure for reducing dental decay.

During the ensuing months, the campaign will reach out to communities and organizations about the serious burdens of oral diseases in Colorado and what steps can be taken to improve the overall oral health of Colorado citizens.

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A website (www.beasmartmouth.com) has been activated and provides information about the campaign's objectives and upcoming activities. A *Be a Smart Mouth* logo and tag line ("Good health begins with a smart mouth") have been created for use on banners, buttons and other collateral items to draw attention to the campaign.

According to Diane Brunson, director of the Oral Health Program at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, "This campaign is all about making Coloradans aware of how important oral health is to their overall health."

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