

Gov. Evers: Budget gives Wisconsin Reason to Smile, \$2 million will expand dental services, \$1 million for free and charitable health centers

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers, together with Department of Health Services Secretary-designee Andrea Palm today will visit two Free and Charitable Health Centers that also provide dental services. They will tour Church Health Services in Beaver Dam from 11-11:45 a.m. and Open Arms Free Clinic in Elkhorn from 1:45-2:30 p.m. Media are invited to attend.

“Healthy teeth aren’t only about appearances. The health of our teeth can affect our overall well-being,” Gov. Evers said. “Yet, many families in our state forgo visits to the dentist due to cost, limited or no insurance coverage, or limited access to services. My budget makes it easier for these families to get preventive and restorative care so their smiles stay healthy.”

More Wisconsinites have a greater reason to smile thanks to an additional \$2 million dollars in Gov. Evers’ 2019-2021 biennial budget which will support the state’s oral health program. The Oral Health Program of the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) served over 100,000 state residents in 2018, of which 71,000 were students.

In 2018, the Oral Health Program supported 38 school-based sealant programs

known as Wisconsin Seal-A-Smile across 54 of the state's 72 counties. In all, these programs reached 769 schools and 71,000 students during the 2017-2018 school year. The governor's budget provides a \$175,000 increase for the 2019-2020 school year, \$350,000 increase for 2020-2021, and an additional \$100,000 for advanced dental services, including dental fillings.

To increase access to dental services, the program also funds rural health and safety net clinics. Program funded safety net clinics served over 26,000 people last year, while rural health clinics in three Western Wisconsin counties served nearly 2,400 people in 2018. The governor's budget increases the amount available to safety-net clinics by \$425,000 in 2019-2020, and \$850,000 in 2020-2021, allowing more Wisconsin residents to access dental care.

In addition to the increased funding to the Oral Health Program, the budget also includes \$1 million in grants for the Wisconsin Association of Free and Charitable Clinics (WAFCC) to support clinics that provide oral health services to state residents who cannot afford or do not have access to this type of care.

To learn more about the Oral Health Programs and the services available, go to <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/oral-health/index.htm>