



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Martha Harbin  
[mharbin@policywisdom.com](mailto:mharbin@policywisdom.com)  
(850) 251-2803

## **Report: Floridians are visiting hospital emergency rooms for preventable dental conditions in ever increasing numbers with exponential cost increases**

**February 26, 2014 (West Palm Beach, Fla.)** - A study by the Florida Public Health Institute (FPHI) found more than 139,000 Floridians were treated in 2012 in hospital emergency departments for oral health problems that could have been treated in a dental office or clinic or avoided with adequate prevention and primary dental care. Charges for these visits exceeded \$141 million.

The 2012 visits surpassed by 8,000 the number of similar visits in 2011; a 6.4 percent increase. Charges, however, climbed 22 percent to more than \$25 million.

The most dramatic increases in charges were to tax-supported Medicare and Medicaid and their related managed care plans.

Medicare charges climbed 33.5 percent, increasing from \$10.3 million in 2011 to \$13.7 million in 2012. The number of visits increased 13.7 percent, from 9,344 in 2011 to 10,630 in 2012.

Similarly, visits charged to Medicaid increased 10 percent between 2011 and 2012, climbing from 46,681 visits to 51,340. Corresponding charges indicate a 25 percent Medicaid spending increase from \$39.5 million in 2011 to \$49.2 million in 2012.

The private commercial insurance market experienced a six percent increase in such ED visits but a 20 percent increase in charges. The number of uninsured people seeking dental care in the state's hospital emergency rooms grew by a relatively modest 2.8 percent, but also saw a double digit increase in charges of 20 percent.

FPHI Executive Director Roderick King, MD, MPH said further research is needed to know what factors are driving the increase in visits and the higher charges but the numbers make a compelling case for expanding access to primary dental care.

"Hospital emergency departments represent the most expensive source of medical care and they are poorly equipped to treat dental conditions," Dr. King said. "These kinds of numbers, and the stories of human suffering they represent, are a forceful argument for making increased access to primary dental care a priority in Florida."

Dr. King said he suspects the economy is an underlying factor to the steady increase in emergency room dental visits, an increase evident during the Institute’s 2011 analysis of 2008 – 2010 data, and the study released today. A change to the methodology used in the 2011 study precludes a linear comparison with the most current report, but the trends show the numbers and charges have consistently increased overall.

There was one category of data in which the numbers belied the trends: Both the number of visits and amount of charges to the state's KidCare program decreased from 2011 to 2012. However, Dr. King warned against drawing conclusions without further research.

"With the KidCare numbers, we could be seeing a positive outcome in that kids are getting access to a dentist and avoiding trips to the ER," Dr. King said. "Or, due to the economy, parents may be dropping their KidCare coverage because they no longer can afford to pay the premiums and their kids are ending up in the emergency department as Medicaid patients or as Self-Pay."

Self-Pay is a state designation for uninsured patients who indicate their intention to pay out of pocket for their care. The law requires hospital emergency departments treat all patients regardless of their ability to pay and hospitals report a high number of these bills go unpaid resulting in higher costs of care.

Dr. King said the Florida Public Health Institute is conducting further analysis on the pediatric emergency department data and expects to issue a follow-up report in March.

Upon release, readers may access the full report, including fact sheets for individual counties through the Florida Public Health Institute website:

<http://flhealthinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/FLORIDA-2011-2012-Statewide-worksheet-1.pdf>

Top Five Reasons Patients Give for Oral Health-Related Emergency Department Visits	
525.9: UNSPECIFIED DISORDER OF THE TEETH AND SUPPORTING STRUCTURES	\$86,014,843 96,651
528.9: OTHER AND UNSPECIFIED DISEASES OF THE ORAL SOFT TISSUES	\$8,941,857 8,168
522.5: PERIAPICAL ABSCESS WITHOUT SINUS	\$8,293,841 6,016
521: UNSPECIFIED DENTAL CARIES	\$4,904,310 5,972
784.2: SWELLING MASS OR LUMP IN HEAD AND NECK	\$7,213,868 4,154

For more information please contact the Florida Public Health Institute by calling (561) 838-4444 or by emailing [info@flphi.org](mailto:info@flphi.org).

*The study was funded by a grant from the DentaQuest Foundation.*

**Contact information:**

Florida Public Health Institute

2701 North Australian Ave., Suite 204; West Palm Beach, FL 33407

(561) 838-4444

[info@flphi.org](mailto:info@flphi.org)

[www.flphi.org](http://www.flphi.org)

Twitter: [@FPHI](https://twitter.com/FPHI)

<https://www.facebook.com/FloridaPublicHealthInstitute>