

July 7, 2022

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McCarthy and Leader McConnell:

On behalf of our collective organizations, we would like to urge your support of H.R.4439, the Medicaid Dental Benefit Act and S. 3166, the Medicaid Dental Benefits Act of 2021. This legislation would make comprehensive dental care a required component of Medicaid coverage for adults in every state.

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must not forget the important lessons COVID-19 has taught us about our health system. The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the inadequacies within our social safety net programs, most starkly in oral health care. During the pandemic, nearly [half of US adults reported delaying dental care](#). And unfortunately, this problem has only grown due to the [large increases in Medicaid enrollment](#) since the start of the pandemic. From February 2020 to May 2021, adult enrollment increased by nearly 23 percent.

Many adults who rely on Medicaid benefits find that there is little, if any, coverage for dental care. A long-standing lack of focus on adult oral health care from federal and state governments has created a patchwork of dental coverage by state Medicaid programs. American adults on Medicaid find options for dental care vary based on their state. Less than half of the states provide “extensive” dental coverage for adults in their Medicaid programs. The others offer limited benefits, emergency-only coverage, or nothing at all for adults. Without a federal requirement, and given the competing priorities for state budgets, the optional adult dental benefit is often not provided by states.

This lack of state coverage is particularly problematic because the millions of adults who rely on Medicaid are the least likely to access dental care (including basic preventive services), face the biggest cost barriers to dental care, and are more likely than their higher income counterparts to experience dental pain, report poor mouth health, and find their lives to be less satisfying due to their poor oral health.

Ensuring that states provide comprehensive dental services to adult Medicaid beneficiaries is a sound economic investment. Recently, [new research](#) from the ADA’s Health Policy Institute estimated what it would cost to secure dental coverage for the

millions of adults who rely on Medicaid for their health care. The study shows that across the 28 states that currently do not provide comprehensive dental coverage, the net cost of providing extensive adult dental benefits is \$836 million per year. This includes an estimated \$1.1 billion per year in dental care costs and \$273 million per year in medical care savings. As Medicaid oral health coverage opens the door to regular care in more appropriate and cost-effective settings, fewer people would turn to emergency departments to relieve dental pain. This change could save our health system \$2.7 billion annually. Also, poor oral health creates social and economic barriers that prevent many low-income adults from economic advancement. Eliminating these barriers would generate additional savings and empower people to pursue better jobs and careers. (Download the report with detailed state by-state analysis "[Making the Case for Dental Coverage for Adults in All State Medicaid Programs](#)".)

We would appreciate your support for this legislation moving forward and will continue working with you and your staff to improve the oral health of Americans. Please contact Chris Tampio at tampioc@ada.org or 202-789-5178 to facilitate further discussion.

Sincerely,

American Dental Association
Academy of General Dentistry
American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research
American Association of Endodontists
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology
American Academy of Periodontology
American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry
American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons
American Association of Orthodontists
American Student Dental Association
Association of Dental Support Organizations
Community Catalyst
Dental Trade Alliance
Diverse Dental Society
Hispanic Dental Association
National Dental Association