

August 12, 2021

SENT VIA EMAIL

U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Member of Congress,

As the president of the American Dental Association, and on behalf of our 162,000 member dentists, I want you to know that our profession is committed to addressing the oral health needs of all Americans – including older Americans. As Congress is discussing expanding Medicare to include dental benefits, we want to help you to provide the best oral health care to seniors while ensuring a robust provider network is in place.

An expansion of Medicare benefits should include a comprehensive dental benefit that meets the needs of beneficiaries up to 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL). Estimates show that these beneficiaries would cover about 47% of the older adult population (Kaiser Family Foundation). This would provide meaningful coverage to most seniors who presently do not visit a dentist because they cannot afford it. The percent of Medicare eligible seniors who have experienced increased cost barriers to dental care steadily rose from 2009-2019. Seniors with incomes at or below 133% of the FPL saw the largest increase in cost barriers from 10% in 2009 to 26% in 2019 (Health Policy Institute, ADA).

The current Medicare program also includes distinct “parts” that recognize the variability in delivery of health care services such as hospital care, physician services and prescription drugs. The dental care system is significantly different from the medical care delivery system. Therefore, a dental benefit under Medicare merits a designated program recognizing those differences in the delivery of oral health care. The ADA believes that any expansion of Medicare to include dental should be through a separate new program dedicated to providing comprehensive dental care for low income seniors – not the Medicare Part B program that has been part of past and current proposals.

We hope that an innovative approach that is adequately funded and efficiently administered and utilizes private, non-profit and government solutions will provide a workable solution and offer opportunities for improved oral health for those whose care is most critical – low income seniors.

We look forward to continuing this important conversation with you and your staff as Congress considers how best to provide oral health care to our Nation’s seniors.

Sincerely,

/s/

Daniel J. Klemmedson, D.D.S., M.D.  
President