



# Medicaid: Advancing Access to Dental Care and Reforming Administrative Barriers

## Medicaid Dental Benefit Act of 2023 & SMILED Act

The American Dental Association strongly supports S.570/H.R. 1342, the Medicaid Dental Benefit Act of 2023 and H.R. 1422, the Strengthening Medicaid Incentives for Licensees Enrolled in Dental (SMILED) Act in the House. The Medicaid Dental Benefit Act was introduced by Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Representative Nanette Barragán (D-CA). The SMILED Act was introduced by Representative Mike Simpson (R-ID).

Today, many adults who rely on Medicaid benefits find that there is little, if any, coverage for dental care due to a patchwork of dental benefits by state Medicaid programs. Without a federal requirement, and given the competing priorities for state budgets, the optional adult dental benefit is often not provided by states or is limited. Currently, only about half of the states provide comprehensive adult dental coverage to their Medicaid enrollees.

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.
  - 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 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.
  - Additionally, 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.
- Administrative barriers to dentists who want to participate in the Medicaid program create challenges for patients who are trying to access dental care. The SMILED Act would reduce these administrative barriers by making it easier for dentists to become credentialed Medicaid providers. Additionally, the bill would help to ensure fair Medicaid audits by requiring that they be performed by a dentist from the same specialty and based on guidelines from the ADA and other dental organizations.

By cosponsoring these bills, you can make comprehensive dental care a mandatory component of Medicaid coverage for adults in every state and also increase access to oral health care within the Medicaid program by reducing administrative barriers for providers.

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