

The American Dental Association (ADA) recognizes that practice efficiency and full patient schedules are high priorities for dentists. This document outlines strategies to consider for dentists participating in Medicaid to maximize practice productivity, decrease patient cancellations and missed appointments, and reduce administrative burdens.

Strategies for Dentists to Reduce Patient Cancellations and Missed Appointments

1. **Engage in patient support strategies** offered by the managed care organization (MCO) to provide transportation services, appointment reminders, and increased oral health literacy to Medicaid beneficiaries. Dental practices should have access to these resources based on the patient's MCO and use these resources proactively. It is also important to remember that MCOs may pay for transportation and a cancelled or missed appointment is a part of a costly cycle for the MCOs, as well.

Conversing with patients on expectations, practice protocols, and the necessity of not missing the appointment is a great strategy and must be delivered with civility and without implicit bias. A re-appointment policy and an emergency walk-in policy are useful practice tools to offer patients.

2. **Incorporate scheduling best practices** to align with your practice model and protocols. *It is important to note that despite the desire to charge a fee for a cancelled or missed appointment, Medicaid beneficiaries are excluded from such charges due to federal statutes and regulations.*

Strategies for reducing missed appointments include setting expectations for compliance and engaging the MCO in the process.

Examples of scheduling best practices include:

- Requiring patients to sign a contract before they schedule an appointment with the dental practice and the dental practice policy if that appointment is canceled or missed. *It is important that appointment policies be consistent for all patients, regardless of insurance status or type.*
 - Employing text message or phone call reminders for appointments, including extra reminders the morning of the appointment. Appointment reminders can ultimately help patients prioritize the appointment amidst other life events. In addition, it is important to confirm all contact information with all patients on a regular basis to ensure effective communication can be achieved.
 - In an era of advancing technology and new applications, the burden can be taken off of the provider or practice and [utilize tested strategies](#) to support patients.
3. **Maximize practice staff and expanded workforce models** to achieve improved efficiencies. This may include utilizing a care coordinator (i.e., community health worker, patient navigator, community dental health coordinator, etc.) to support dental assistants performing screening and anticipatory guidance or training staff in skills that improve patient coordination.
 4. **Demonstrate compassion.** Patients may still have challenges when it comes to finding the means and time to travel to the dentist. Patients may also struggle with anxiety and fear, despite knowing the importance of obtaining dental services. By reviewing some of the [common reasons for missed appointments](#), providers and their staff can implement strategies to improve patient-provider relationships. Dentists should also keep in mind state thresholds of Medicaid eligibility that may impact appointment attendance options. Offers of childcare services, appointments to accommodate multiple family members, and other approaches may give patients the sense of being understood and cared for by their providers.