

March 10, 2017

The Honorable Ricardo Rosselló
La Fortaleza
P.O. Box 9020082
San Juan, PR 00902-0082

Dear Governor Rosselló,

On behalf of the American Dental Association, we write to urge you to reconsider a potential decision by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to define dental benefits as “optional” within the Medicaid program as a means of addressing budgetary constraints.

It has been the experience of many states that have tried to reduce health care costs by cutting back on dental Medicaid coverage that such an approach is likely to result in additional health care expenditures in the long run because those uninsured individuals seek care in hospital emergency rooms (ER). Visits to the ER for dental pain are costly and can range from \$400 to \$1,500 compared to a \$90 to \$200 visit to a dentist.

For example, in July 2009, California Medicaid eliminated its comprehensive adult dental coverage as a result of budget constraints. The impact of this policy change led to a significant and immediate increase in dental services costs with more than 1,800 additional dental ER visits per year. Average yearly costs associated with dental ER visits increased by 68%.

Hospitals cannot provide definitive care to address dental disease, resulting in patients visiting the ER multiple times for the same problem. In fact, studies have shown that 39% of these patients, who are typically only prescribed painkillers and antibiotics, return to the ER.

The importance of oral health to overall health status cannot be overestimated. In the management of chronic diseases, such as diabetes, elimination of dental services can lead to higher medical costs.

We respectfully urge you to reconsider this decision which can lead to unfortunate health outcomes accompanied by lengthier and more costly care.

Dr. Liselie Reyes, President, Colegio de Cirujanos Dentistas de Puerto Rico, can provide the perspective of the dentists in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Dr. Reyes can be reached at administrador@ccdpr.org and (787) 764-1969.

Sincerely,



Gary Roberts, D.D.S.
President