

Advocating for a Publicly Funded Dental Benefit

When advocating for a dental benefit in Medicaid, you need to design your message that best appeals to your audience. Here are a couple approaches when advocating for a dental benefit in Medicaid or Medicare:

1. **Economics of the issue** – ER visits are 10x more expensive than preventative care and don't really treat the problem. This results in a waste of public resources and unnecessary costs to the state, hospital and patients. Further, studies have linked oral health to chronic diseases and routine, preventative dental care may offset the cost of expensive chronic disease maintenance. Use data to support your advocacy:
 - [Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits: An Overview, Center for Health Care Strategies.](#)
 - [Oral Health Care State Fact Sheets, Health Policy Institute](#)
 - [Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Adults in Medicaid, Kaiser Family Foundation](#)
 2. **Social Justice issue** – The biggest barrier to access is cost. And in turn, poor oral health has been known to impact employability, lost school and workdays, which only continues the cycle of poverty and negatively impacts the quality of life of an individual. **See the article below** for key messages when talking about oral health as a social justice issue.
 3. **Use examples from your state and personal experiences.** Use stories from your experiences to share with legislators and others so that they may understand the importance of oral health to the quality of life and health of an individual. Legislators use these stories as support for their ideas and can move others to act on policy if they show how it impacts the day to day lives of their constituents.
-

[How Dental Inequality Hurts Americans](#) Published 2/19/18

Tweets/Key Messages for Comments:

- “Lack of dental care through Medicaid not only harms people’s health, but has negative economic implications as well”
- Oral health care is essential to overall health but when state budgets are constrained, dental coverage is often the first benefit to be eliminated.
- Adults unable to afford routine dental care share a disproportionate share of oral disease and, in turn, have elevated risks for chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.
- In addition to the burden of living with and treating costly chronic diseases, poor oral health undermines an individual’s economic security and can lead to lost workdays, reduced employability, and the preventable use of costly acute care.
- “Studies document that we make judgments about one another — including about intelligence — according to the aesthetics of teeth and mouth. People who appear to have poor oral health risk their chances of employability.”
- Not all states offer a dental benefit in Medicaid and those states that do offer the benefit, vary in their level of coverage.
- “The definition of “limited” varies by state, but in all such states benefits are capped at \$1,000 per year and cover less than 100 of 600 recognized dental procedures.”
- An adult dental benefit in Medicaid improves quality of life and saves hospitals, the state and patients money.