

November 22, 2021

The Honorable Ben Cardin  
United States Senate  
509 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cardin:

On behalf of our 162,000 members, the American Dental Association (ADA) would like to thank you for introducing S. 3166, the Medicaid Dental Benefits Act of 2021, which would make comprehensive dental care a mandatory component of Medicaid coverage for adults in every state.

As we continue to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must not forget the important lessons COVID-19 has taught us about our health system. The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the inadequacies within our social safety net programs, most starkly in oral health care. During the pandemic, nearly [half of US adults reported delaying dental care](#). And unfortunately, this problem has only grown due to the [large increases in Medicaid enrollment](#) since the start of the pandemic. From February 2020 to May 2021, adult enrollment increased by nearly 23 percent.

Many adults who rely on Medicaid benefits find that there is little, if any, coverage for dental care, and they are unable to afford basic dental care on their own. Dental care presents the [most significant cost barriers](#) to care compared to any other health service, regardless of income level or insurance status. A long-standing lack of focus on adult oral health care from federal and state governments has created a patchwork of dental coverage by state Medicaid programs. American adults on Medicaid find options for dental care vary based on their state. Less than half of the states provide “extensive” dental coverage for adults in their Medicaid programs. The others offer limited benefits, emergency-only coverage, or nothing at all for adults. Without a federal requirement, and given the competing priorities for state budgets, the optional adult dental benefit is often not provided by states.

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 and equitable investment. As such, we commend you for your efforts to lead on this issue and urge other members of Congress to cosponsor the Medicaid Dental Benefits Act of 2021. We look forward to continue working with you and your staff to

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advance this issue. Please contact Megan Mortimer at [mortimerm@ada.org](mailto:mortimerm@ada.org) or (202) 701-9593 to facilitate further discussion.

Sincerely,

Cesar R. Sabates, D.D.S.  
President

Raymond A. Cohlma, D.D.S.  
Executive Director

CRS:RAC:dnl