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January 2025

Access to Dental Care Legislative Package

Addresses gaps in access for underserved communities and Medicaid enrollees



The Maryland General Assembly convened on January 8, 2025 in Annapolis and will be in session for 90 days, or until April 7, 2025. While it will be a challenging session for legislators and advocates, MDAC looks to its broad network of partners and stakeholders to continue to move forward and build on collective achievements from previous sessions with [legislation that addresses](#), expands, and improves equitable access to dental care for Marylanders. Legislation continues to be introduced and MDAC will continue to monitor activities.

If you have question or need addition information, please feel free to contact Mary Backley, CEO, MDAC (mbackley@mdac.us).

Johns Hopkins Hosts Global Oral Health Symposium

MDAC on panel addressing Maryland oral health issues and achievements

The 2025 Global Oral Health Symposium, March 27-28, 2025 in Baltimore, will bring together experts from oral health, global health, and medicine to explore

the importance of integrating oral health into broader global health systems. Engaging keynote speakers, panel discussions, and interactive sessions will focus on health equity, access to care, and cross-disciplinary collaboration.



The event will kick off with a session entitled **“Perspectives from Baltimore: Local to Global - Contributions to the Oral-Systemic Debate,”** which will include a panel of well-known and active stakeholders to discuss oral health in Maryland. The panel will include Lois Cohen of the Paul G. Rogers Ambassador for Global Health Research; Eleanor Fleming, Director of Health Equity Research and Innovation at the University of Maryland School of Dentistry; Mary Otto, Journalist & Author of “Teeth: The Story of Beauty, Inequality, and the Struggle for Oral Health in America,” and Mary Backley, Chief Executive Officer, Maryland Dental Action Coalition. The panel will be moderated by Dushanka Kleinman, Professor at the University of Maryland School of Public Health. Debonya Hughes, DDS, Maryland State Dental Director, will also be featured on a panel later in the day, “From State to Global Perspectives.”

The program will explore the interaction of global health and oral health bringing together experts to discuss:

- A Baltimore solution to integration
- Integrating oral health into medicine and public health
- Ethical responsibility to global oral health
- Humanitarian oral health initiatives
- Expanding the oral health workforce
- Innovations for the 21st century
- Patient quality and safety
- Health economics case study
- And more!

Whether you're a healthcare provider, global health researcher, or an advocate, you'll gain valuable insights into the interconnectedness of oral with overall health and explore actionable strategies to address disparities in care across the globe.

[Register for this free program.](#)

New Report: Dental Provider Participation in Maryland Healthy Smiles Dental Program

Maryland Department of Health Report Issued Pursuant to HB 290/Ch. 377 of the Acts of 2023

Pursuant to House Bill 290, (Ch. 377 of the Acts of 2023), the Maryland Medical Assistance Program, within the Maryland Department of Health, is required to submit a report that studies dental provider participation in the Maryland Healthy Smiles Dental Program. The report includes sections, and relevant data, that

address Medicaid Dental Care Access and Provider Participation; Administrative Processes Relating to Initial Enrollment and Renewal of Providers in Maryland Healthy Smiles; Incentives to Encourage Provider Participation in Maryland Healthy Smiles; Stakeholder Engagement; and Conclusions and Next Steps.

[Review the report here.](#)

Research Emphasizes Link Between Oral & Mental Health

Underscores significance of bidirectional connection

As reported in [Decisions in Dentistry](#), a recent study published in *Translational Psychiatry* cites an increasing body of evidence highlights a link between mental health disorders — such as anxiety, depression, stress — and oral health issues such as periodontal diseases, tooth loss, and chronic pain. Mental health challenges often contribute to poor oral hygiene habits, higher levels of inflammation, and increased risk for dental disease. On the contrary, oral health problems including persistent dental pain can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and depression, directly impacting patients' quality of life.

Oral health professionals can make a difference by creating an open, judgment-free environment where patients feel comfortable discussing their challenges, including anxiety about dental visits or stress affecting their oral health habits. Looking for red flags such as poor oral hygiene, bruxism, or signs of self-neglect, may identify underlying mental health concerns.

In addition, partnering and integration of care with mental health providers can be transformative. Establishing a referral network ensures patients receive the comprehensive care they need. For example, a patient with severe bruxism linked to stress may benefit from both a night guard and cognitive behavioral therapy to manage the root cause.

Preventive education is another key strategy. Oral health professionals can emphasize how oral health routines are part of a broader strategy to maintain mental and physical health. Studies show that small wins in oral health can have a positive ripple effect, boosting confidence and mental resilience.

[A complete report on the study can be found here.](#)

Medicaid's Role in Small Towns and Rural Areas

Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy Center for Children and Families issues report

One-fifth of people in the United States live in areas that are classified as non-urban. Residents of rural areas and small towns face additional challenges accessing needed health services compared to residents of metro areas for a variety of reasons including acute



provider shortages, limited connectivity, and long distances to travel to access care, often without reliable public transportation options. Residents of rural areas also have worse health outcomes, including higher maternal and infant mortality rates; higher mortality rates from heart disease, cancer, and stroke; and higher rates of mental illness and overdose deaths. In addition, residents of rural areas and small towns have lower incomes on average than people living in metro areas and less access to employer-sponsored health insurance, meaning that public coverage such as Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program fill an even more critical role in these areas than in other areas of the country. While uninsured rates have come down significantly since passage of the Affordable Care Act, they remain higher in small towns and rural areas than in metro areas.

Cuts to federal Medicaid funding and other changes to Medicaid being contemplated in Congress will cause harm everywhere but are more likely to cause greater harm to rural communities and small towns than metro areas.

[A full copy of the report can be found here.](#)

Maryland Rural Health Association Annual Legislative Forum

Please join MDAC and other colleagues in Annapolis on **February 27, 2025, 11:45 am - 1:00 pm**, for the **MRHA Annual Legislative Forum**. At this event you will have a chance to network, hear updates, and chat with members of the Maryland General Assembly. A limited number of tickets are available; register now to secure your spot! Registration cost is \$40 (Students: \$20) and lunch is included.



Speakers:

- Paul Monteiro, Jr., J.D., Secretary of Service & Civic Innovation
- Thomas Hutchinson, Delegate, District 37B, Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot, & Wicomico Counties
- Dawn Gile, Senator, District 33

This annual event will be held at the Goldstein Treasury Building, Assembly Room, 80 Calvert Street, Annapolis, MD 21404.

[Register for the forum.](#)

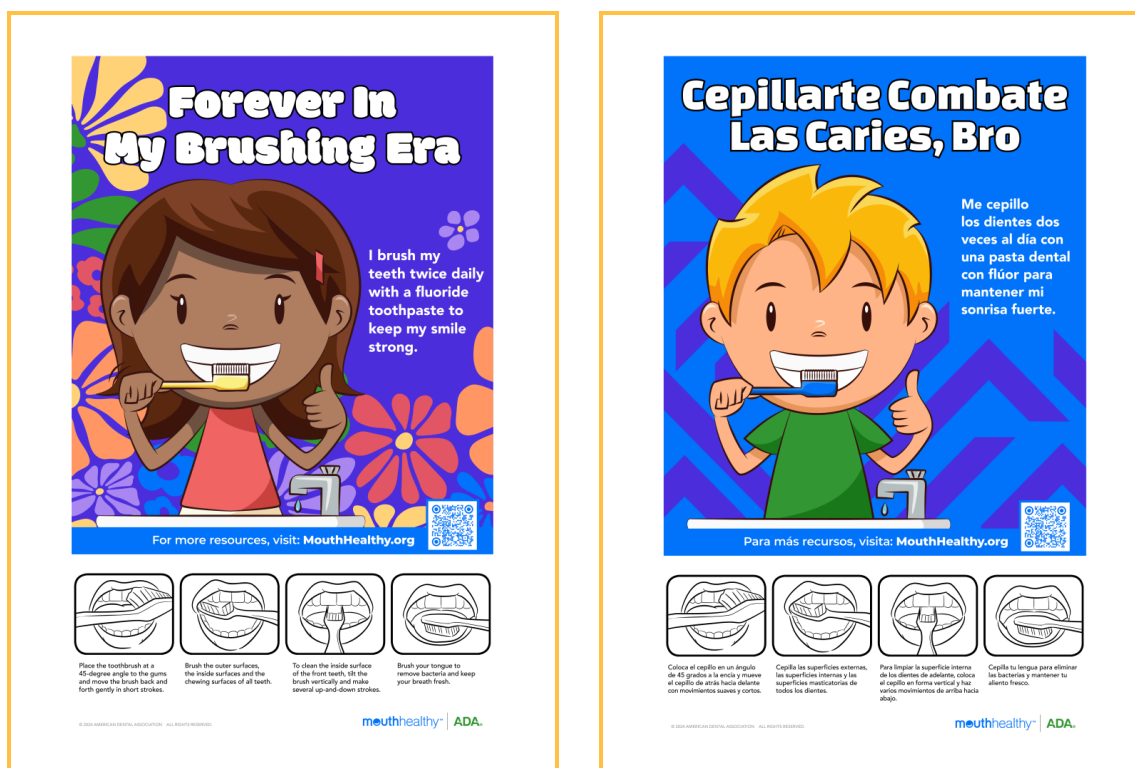
The following article was submitted by the Maryland Department of Health Office of Oral Health.



National Children's Dental Health Month Resources

February is **National's Children's Dental Health Month**, but every day should be about children's dental health. This year, in place of the traditional posters, the American Dental Association is offering new materials to celebrate and promote children's dental health, not only during the month of February, but all year long. The two year-round themes are **Brushing Fights Cavities, Bruh and Forever in My Brushing Era**.

Posters are available for digital download in two designs and two sizes: 8.5"x11" and 11"x17". Matching coloring sheets in two designs are offered in 8.5"x11". All materials are available in English and Spanish.



In addition, the [ADA's 2025 Brushing Calendar](#) is available now for digital download. This 12-month calendar is valuable year-round for promoting healthy behaviors like brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste to help prevent dental disease. [Visit ADA's NCDHM page.](#)

2025 Maryland Oral Health Resource Guide Now Available

The Maryland Department of Health Office of Oral Health has released their updated Maryland Oral Health Resource Guide for 2025. The Resource Guide assists families, caregivers and advocates in finding affordable public health dental care services in Maryland and in the immediate surrounding regions.

View the [English Resource Guide](#) and the [Spanish Resource Guide](#).

Other National Children's Dental Health Month Resources

American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry Resource for National Children's Dental Health Month

To highlight National Children's Dental Health Month, AAPD will offer resources on social media platforms throughout the month of February that will include tips for families to support oral health care for children as well as information and guidance from pediatric dentists. Mark your calendar to follow along with AAPD and colleagues:

- [AAPD Instagram](#)
- [AAPD Facebook](#)
- [AAPD Foundation Instagram](#)
- [AAPD Foundation Facebook](#)

National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center

The National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Center (OHRC) responds to the needs of professionals working in states and communities, with the goal of improving oral health care for pregnant women, infants, children, and adolescents, including those with special health care needs, and their families (the maternal and child health (MCH) population). OHRC is funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau.

OHRC's website can be used to locate materials in its [digital library](#), explore [topics](#) related to oral health for the MCH population, and share [resources for consumers](#) and [resources for professionals](#). Sign up for the monthly [OHRC Update](#) e-newsletter and [e-mail discussion lists](#) and [contact the resource center](#) for further assistance.

Visit MDAC's [resources page](#) on fluoride!

MDAC is committed to ensuring our network of stakeholders has the resources needed to answer questions about fluoride. We are regularly updating this resource page.

"Since 2019, the number of active dentists across the state has decreased from 4,148 to 3,917. This statewide decrease is also linked to COVID-19, which impacted all providers, not just those who accept Medicaid. Meanwhile, the number of dentists enrolled in Healthy Smiles continued to increase, going from 1,567 in CY 2019 to 1,912 in CY 2023."

2023 Report on Dental Provider Participation in Maryland Healthy Smiles Dental Program

NEWS & RESOURCES

Advocacy/Policy

[Reimagining Public Health Advocacy](#)

Disparities

[Addressing Oral Health Disparities in Rhode Island](#)

Fluoride

[Reconsidering the Evidence on Fluoride](#)

[Fluoride in Drinking Water Is Safe. Here's the Evidence](#)

Integration of Care

[The Connection Between Oral Health and Overall Health](#)

[Integration of Primary and Oral Health Care—An Unrealized Opportunity](#)

[SDF Application in a Pediatric Medical Setting](#)

[Integrating Oral and Mental Health During and After Pregnancy is Critical to Improving Health Outcomes](#)

Medicaid/Rural

[Medicaid Coverage in Metro and Small Town/Rural Counties in Maryland, 2023](#)

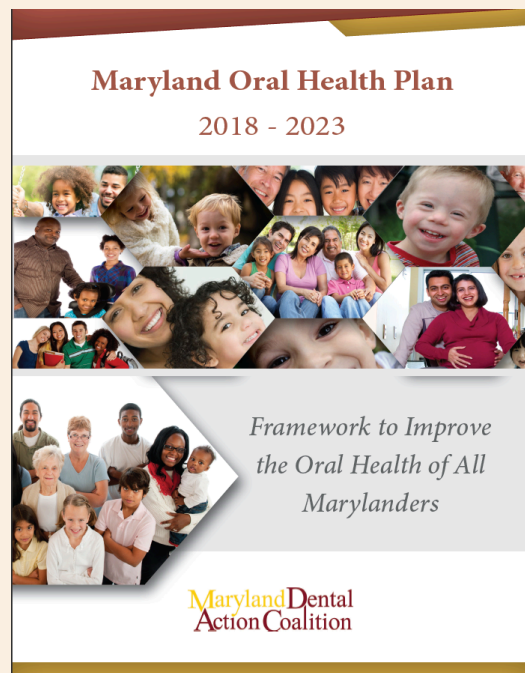
Medicare

[Inclusion of Dental Services in Medicare to Improve Oral and](#)

RESOURCE: Provider Enrollment Flyer

To learn how Maryland dental providers can enroll in the Maryland Healthy Smiles Dental Program and resources provided, [review this enrollment flyer](#) and share with others!

RESOURCE: Maryland Oral Health Plan



The Maryland Oral Health Plan outlines 11 oral health goals in three key areas: access to oral health care, oral disease and injury prevention, and oral health literacy and education.

[General Health for Older Americans](#)

[Medicare Adult Dental Coverage](#)

[Medicare Drives \\$4 Billion Growth in US Dental Spending](#)

[Medicare Advantage Dental Plans Fall Short on Coverage](#)

Minimally Invasive Care

[Championing Minimally Invasive Care](#)

Oral Health Services

[Wearing Dentures May Slow Cognitive Decline](#)

Public Health Infrastructure

[Pathway to a Healthier America: A Blueprint for Strengthening Public Health for the New Administration and Congress](#)

Social Determinants of Health

[Social Determinants of Health Linked with Oral Health](#)

Workforce

[NYS Bill Seeks to Expand Access to Dentistry by Licensing Dental Therapists](#)

DOWNLOAD THE PLAN

The Maryland Oral Health Plan is financially supported by the Maryland Department of Health.

Legislative Contacts

[U.S. Senators \(MD\)](#)

[U.S. Representatives \(MD\)](#)

[Maryland State Legislators](#)

Meetings/ Events/ Webinars

[Families USA Health Action Conference](#)
[January 24-25, 2025](#)

[National Association of Community Health Centers Policy and Issues Forum](#)
[February 5-8, 2024](#)
[Marriott Marquis, Washington, DC](#)

[American Institute of Dental Public Health, Colloquium: Dental Care as a Human Right: Advancing Oral Health Justice Through Community Empowerment, March 4-5, 2025](#)
[Virtual](#)

[American Dental Education Association Annual Session & Exhibition](#)
[March 8-11, 2025](#)
[National Harbor, Maryland](#)

[National Oral Health Conference](#)
[April 7-9, 2025](#)
[Double Tree by Hilton Hotel](#)
[Orlando, FL](#)



Join us! To become an MDAC member, [click here.](#)

CONTACT

Do you have events or announcements you'd like to share? Contact MDAC, and we'll make every effort to include them in our next newsletter, as space permits.

Contact MDAC

JOIN

MDAC is statewide coalition of clinical care providers, governments, non-profits, academic institutions, managed care organizations, foundations and associations working collaboratively to improve the health of all Marylanders through increased oral health promotion, disease prevention, education, advocacy and access to oral health care.

Join MDAC

www.mdac.us

FOLLOW US



Maryland Dental Action Coalition | 10015 Old Columbia Road Suite B-215 | Columbia, MD 21046 US

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