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Editor's Note: Quotes included below from advocates testifying in support of House Bill 6 were pulled from written testimony as prepared. Oral testimony may not be verbatim.

Delegates, Advocates & Patients Testify in Support of House Bill 6 To Add Adult Dental Coverage to Maryland Medicaid; Cross File Bill Hearing of SB 150

MD is one of only three states to exclude dental coverage for adults in Medicaid; Powerful testimony from elected leaders, advocates and family members led the call to close the gap

(ANNAPOLIS, MD) – Delegate [Bonnie Cullison](#) (D - Montgomery) and Delegate [Mike McKay](#) (R - Allegany & Washington) today presented [House Bill 6](#) to the House Health & Government Operations Committee that would mandate comprehensive adult dental coverage in Maryland's Medicaid program, the health insurance program for the state's poorest residents. The bill would bring the State of Maryland in line with 47 other states that include adult dental health care in its Medicaid coverage. The states of Alabama and Tennessee also do not offer any Medicaid adult dental coverage.

The virtual hearing (which can be found via this [link](#)) featured compelling testimony from patients, family members and advocates who described situations ranging from fatal drug overdoses due to chronic pain to detrimental quality of life to excessive and costly medical bills due to untreated dental care and lack of access.

“I grew up in a family where we went to the dentist twice a year, even when it was a financial struggle. I've carried the value of access to dental care with me my whole life and into my legislative career. Each year since I've been in office, we've made incremental progress in increasing access to dental care. This is the year to reach the finish line. It's time to ensure all adults with Medicaid can get the dental services they need to stay healthy,” said Delegate McKay, the self-proclaimed “Dental Delegate,” a Republican from Allegany and Washington counties, and the bill's co-sponsor.

Co-sponsor Delegate Cullison followed with her testimony calling for the bill's passage.

“When former Governor William Donald Schaefer made the difficult decision to cut adult dental coverage from Maryland's Medicaid program for cost savings during a fiscal crisis, no one imagined it would take decades to restore this crucial part of public health. With a record budget surplus this year, there are no excuses left. It is time to cover adult dental care for our lowest income Marylanders,” said Delegate Cullison. “We stepped up for children living in poverty in remembrance of Deamonte Driver. It is time to step up again for all family members.”

The [Maryland Dental Action Coalition](#) (MDAC) has advocated for the inclusion of dental care for adult Medicaid patients for the past seven years.

“The single most important step in improving the oral health - and overall health - of Marylanders is a Medicaid program that covers dental services for adults. It’s time to close the gap. Oral health affects systemic health, including conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer,” said Mary Backley, chief executive officer for MDAC, in prepared written testimony. “Oral health also affects quality of life - our ability to eat, speak, work and be pain free. Medicaid adult dental coverage is a wise investment and critical step forward to help all Maryland adults lead healthy and productive lives.”

The death of Deamonte Driver in 2007, a seventh grader from Prince George’s County who died from complications of an untreated abscessed tooth due to lack of access to dental care for Medicaid patients, eventually led the State of Maryland to becoming the best state in the nation for children covered by Medicaid.

One of the nation’s leading advocates for the inclusion of oral health care in the Affordable Care Act was U.S. Senator Ben Cardin. Senator Cardin sponsored the amendment to the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Reauthorization bill that included dental care as a mandated benefit in the federally-funded program.

“Maryland cannot lead the country in access to dental care for children on Medicaid and then turn a blind eye to the complete lack of coverage for adults. Just as untreated dental care can lead to death of children, it can and does lead to the death of adults,” said U.S. Senator Cardin, who testified before the Senate Finance Committee on January 25. “It’s past time that all Marylanders have access to quality oral health care.”

Panels of advocates ranging from health care nonprofits to families who have lost loved ones to addiction and disease resulting from untreated dental issues testified in support of the bill.

Philip M. DiMura, MS, Research Scientist with the Office of Quality and Patient Safety for the New York State Department of Health testified about the cost savings of preventive dental care.

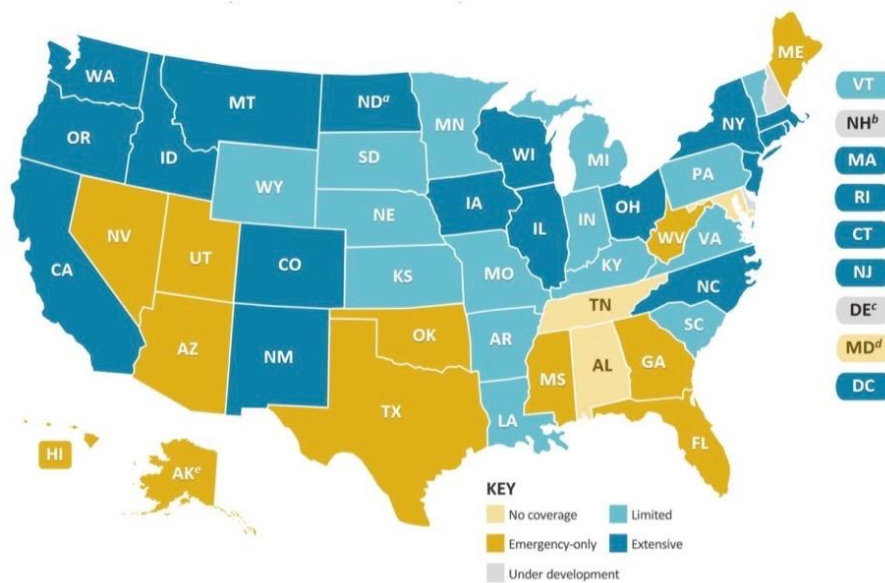
“In an analysis of members with selected chronic diseases, preventive dental care was associated with lower emergency department and inpatient admission utilization rates and costs per member in all disease cohorts. Cost savings were most pronounced for inpatient admissions for members receiving preventive dental care without dental treatment ranging from -\$539 to -\$1950. In conclusion, we found that utilization of preventive dental care was associated with reduced emergency departments and inpatient admission rates and inpatient admission costs,” said DiMura.

On an annual basis, Maryland Medicaid covers 53 percent of all dental care provided in emergency rooms despite the fact that only 17 percent of the adult population is covered by Medicaid. This is a direct result of lack of access to preventive and comprehensive dental care for Medicaid patients. About 800,000 Maryland adults - nearly one in five Marylanders - do not have a reliable source of dental coverage that meets even the most basic health care needs.

“State Medicaid dental coverage for children is mandated by the federal government but dental coverage for adults is a state decision. And, despite being one of the wealthiest states in the

nation, Maryland is one of only a few states without a systematic adult dental Medicaid benefit. I honestly do not understand why there isn't once again a sense of urgency regarding adult dental care coverage," said Dr. Harry Goodman, former director of the Office of Oral Health at the Maryland Department of Health during today's hearing. "And this has been expressly exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. If the goal of any health care system, as illustrated during the pandemic, is to achieve health equity and overcome many of the social determinants of health that impede good health for all Maryland residents, oral health must be part of that discussion."

Coverage of Adult Dental Services in Medicaid



Source: Center for Health Care Strategies, 2019

There is a reason that a vast majority of states provide dental coverage to adults in their Medicaid program. Health care cannot be delivered effectively without dental care. The lack of adult dental coverage drives up health care costs and contributes to health disparities, making it difficult to keep our communities healthy:

People go to emergency rooms because they can't get preventative dental care. This costs more than \$10 million a year for Maryland Medicaid.

Basic dental care can lower the cost of managing chronic diseases, saving \$236 for each preventative dental visit.

Chronic Disease	Behavioral Health	Children's Health	Emergency Dept. Visits
<p>From a NY State Medicaid Study: Reduces chronic disease costs in Medicaid per patient each year:</p> <p>\$772 - Cardiovascular \$2,065 - diabetes \$8,194 - cognitive impairment</p>	<p>From a HRSA-Funded Study in Utah: People who receive dental care stay in substance used disorder treatment two times longer, and are more likely to complete treatment.</p>	<p>From National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey Data: Untreated tooth decay in children dropped by 5% when the parents had Medicaid dental coverage for one year</p>	<p>From an Evaluation of HSCRC Data: Maryland Medicaid spends over \$10 million annually on emergency dept. visits related to chronic dental conditions.</p>

About MDAC: The Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC), the state's leading non-governmental oral health policy and advocacy organization, works to improve the health of all Marylanders through increased oral health promotion, disease prevention, education, advocacy and access to oral health care. MDAC's diverse partner network, consisting of both dental and non-dental professionals and organizations, collaborates in three primary focus areas: oral health literacy and education, advocacy and legislation, and inter-professional collaboration. MDAC develops programs and strategies to reach its primary goal: to improve oral health equity. MDAC leads the development and monitors the progress of the five-year Maryland Oral Health Plan (MOHP), works to improve the oral health of Maryland children through its Healthy Smiles for Life curriculum and the Healthy Teeth, Healthy Kids campaign, and has a well-demonstrated history of partnership development.