

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact

Heather Ford,
410-598-8256
heatherford2@gmail.com

MARYLAND SPENDS \$10 MILLION ON EMERGENCY ROOM VISITS TO TREAT SYMPTOMS RATHER THAN CAUSES OF CHRONIC DENTAL CONDITIONS

Legislation by Senator Mac Middleton Provides Basic Dental Coverage Redirecting Emergency Room Costs to Preventative Care

(ANNAPOLIS, MD – January 24, 2018) – Improved access to preventative oral health care could reduce the cost of emergency room visits for chronic dental conditions, according to a recent study by the Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC), the state's leading non-governmental oral health policy and advocacy organization. The study found that in fiscal year 2016, Maryland adults made 42,327 emergency department visits for chronic dental conditions, with an average charge of \$537 per visit, or a total charge of \$22.7 million.

Legislative briefings held today before the MD Senate Finance and House Health and Government Operations Committees reviewed the study's findings and explored how \$10 million in Medicaid funds might be reinvested to establish an adult dental benefit in Medicaid.

"Basic dental coverage will divert thousands of low income Marylanders from expensive and ultimately fruitless trips to the emergency room while also saving the state millions of dollars. The legislation I introduced today ensures that Maryland provides limited dental coverage as part of the Medicaid program. A small investment in oral health will ease much suffering and save money," said MD Senator Thomas "Mac" Middleton, Chair of the Senate Finance Committee.

Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Dental Coverage for Adults (SB 284), introduced by Sen. Middleton, will require Medicaid to provide a limited adult dental benefit so that Marylanders who might have otherwise relied on the emergency room for treatment will be able to establish a dental home, obtain preventive oral health care, and avert costly chronic dental conditions. MDAC and its coalition partners applaud Senator Middleton's efforts to ensure that low-income adults in Maryland have access to oral health care.

Many Maryland adults face serious financial obstacles to obtaining dental care, which can lead to serious oral health issues and drive people to the emergency room with tooth pain and oral infections. Emergency rooms are unable to treat the causes of dental pain, so they treat the symptoms and send patients home with antibiotics, pain medications, or referrals for dental services that patients may not be able to afford. The high cost of treating symptoms in an emergency room without treating the underlying dental condition is costly, ineffective, and a poor use of resources.

Mary Backley, executive director of the Maryland Dental Action Coalition, said, “The single most important step to improving the oral health – and overall health – of Marylanders is a Medicaid program that covers dental services for adults. Maryland has become a model for the nation in improving the oral health of children. Now we need to do the same for adults.”

###

[Read the cover letter](#) MDAC submitted to the Maryland General Assembly with the report.

<http://mdac.us/pdf/MDAC%20Letter%20Accompanying%20ED%20Study%20Report.pdf>

[Read the report](#) MDAC submitted to the Maryland General Assembly.

<http://mdac.us/pdf/Financial%20Impact%20of%20Hospital%20Visits%20for%20Dental%20Conditions%20in%20MD%20Revised%20Legislative.pdf>

[Learn more](#) about the financial impact of hospital visits for dental conditions in Maryland.

<http://mdac.us/pdf/MDAC%20Aggregate%20Report%20Final.pdf>

For more information: (410) 312-5456 or info@mdac.us

The Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC), the state’s leading non-governmental oral health policy and advocacy organization, works to improve the oral health of all Marylanders through increased oral health promotion, disease prevention, education, advocacy and access to oral health care. MDAC leads the development of the five-year Maryland Oral Health Plan and partners with individuals and organizations working to develop and implement initiatives to enhance oral health for all Marylanders.