

Medicaid Dental Benefit Act of 2021

S. 3166/H.R. 4439

The American Dental Association (ADA) and the American Student Dental Association (ASDA) strongly support S. 3166/H.R. 4439, the Medicaid Dental Benefit Act of 2021 (MDBA), and urge you to co-sponsor this important bill. By doing so, you can make comprehensive dental care a mandatory component of Medicaid coverage for adults in every state.

MDBA was introduced by Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Representative Nanette Barragán (D-CA).

Many adults who rely on Medicaid benefits find that there is little, if any, coverage for dental care. 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 investment. Recently, research from the ADA’s Health Policy Institute estimated what it would cost to secure dental coverage for the millions of adults who rely on Medicaid for their health care. The study shows that across the 28 states that currently do not provide comprehensive dental coverage, the net cost of providing extensive adult dental benefits is \$836 million per year. This includes an estimated \$1.1 billion per year in dental care costs and \$273 million per year in medical care savings. Additionally, as Medicaid oral health coverage opens the door to regular care in more appropriate and cost-effective settings, fewer people would turn to emergency departments to relieve dental pain. This change could save our health system \$2.7 billion annually. Poor oral health also creates social and economic barriers that prevent many low-income adults from economic advancement. Eliminating these barriers would generate additional savings and empower people to pursue better jobs and careers.

As dentists and dental students, we ask you to help Americans who rely on Medicaid get access to dental care by co-sponsoring MDBA, S. 3166/H.R. 4439.