

The Medicaid Dental Benefit Act of 2023 and the SMILED Act

The American Association of Endodontists (AAE) joins the American Dental Association (ADA) and other groups in supporting S. 570/H.R. 1342, the Medicaid Dental Benefit Act of 2023 and the Strengthening Medicaid Incentives for Licensees Enrolled in Dental (SMILED) Act. It was introduced by Senators Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Representative Nanette Barragán (D-CA). Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID) plans to introduce the SMILED Act. Many adults who rely on Medicaid benefits find that they are not covered for dental care due to a patchwork of dental benefits offered by state Medicaid programs. The optional adult dental benefit is generally not provided by states, or is limited, in the absence of a federal requirement and in light of competing priorities within state budgets. In the current state of affairs, fewer than half of the states provide comprehensive dental coverage to their Medicaid enrollees.

As a result of this lack of state coverage, millions of Medicaid-dependent adults face the greatest barriers to accessing dental care (including basic preventive services), face the greatest financial barriers to receiving dental care, and are more likely than their higher income counterparts to suffer from dental pain, report poor oral health, and report having a less fulfilling life due to poor oral health. Medicaid beneficiaries should be provided with comprehensive dental care as part of their Medicaid benefits. This is a prudent economic investment:

- In a study from the American Dental Association's Health Policy Institute, researchers estimated that it would cost millions of Americans who receive health care through Medicaid to receive dental coverage.
- According to the study, the net cost of providing comprehensive dental coverage to adults in the states that do not provide coverage is \$836 million per year in the states that do not provide comprehensive dental coverage. In addition, dental care costs are estimated to be reduced by \$1.1 billion per year and medical care costs reduced by \$273 million per year.
- Moreover, Medicaid coverage for oral health would enable a greater number of people to receive regular care in more appropriate and cost-effective settings, resulting in fewer emergency room visits for dental pain.
- As a result of this change, our health system could save \$2.7 billion annually.

It is difficult for patients who are seeking dental care to access dental care due to administrative barriers. The SMILED Act would remove these administrative barriers by making it easier for dentists to become Medicaid-certified providers. As an additional benefit, the bill would require that Medicaid audits be conducted by a dentist with the same specialty and based on guidelines established by the American Dental Association (ADA) and other dental organizations.

For more information: advocacy@aae.org.