



ISSUE BRIEF

Preserve Medicaid Dental Coverage

Recent health care reform draft legislation proposed restructuring Medicaid financing to a per capita cap or block grant system. Such proposals cause deep concerns in light of potential strain on State budgets and States' ability to continue oral health programs for children and adults.

Congress should preserve the current Medicaid structure and not impose block grants or per capita caps. This is the best way to support State oral health programs and ensure delivery of critical dental services to vulnerable populations.

Tens of millions of Americans or roughly 1 in 4 who have dental benefits access them through publicly funded programs such as Medicaid, CHIP and to a lesser extent, Medicare Advantage plans.



CHILDREN

- More than 45 million children are covered for medical and dental coverage through CHIP and Medicaid.
- Medicaid has traditionally provided children with a unique set of Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment (EPSDT) benefits.
- Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease for children and teens.
- Children with poor dental health are nearly 3 times more likely to miss school due to dental pain.
- As CHIP and Medicaid have grown and reduced the uninsured rate for children, the rate of untreated decay has fallen among children.
- This reduces costs for more expensive dental treatment in Medicaid and helps prevent pain related to tooth decay.

Policymakers must strongly consider the impact that reduced State budgets may have on States' ability to continue these important programs for children and adults.



ADULTS

- Poor oral health is widespread among adults and especially affects those with low incomes
- Poor oral health can limit communication, social interaction and employability that is needed to end the cycle of poverty.
- Providing adult dental benefits through Medicaid has a significant impact on access to and utilization among low income adults and also significantly reduces costly emergency department visits for dental conditions.
- Treatment of gum disease can help reduce treatment costs for chronic and high cost medical conditions (i.e. type 2 diabetes, coronary artery disease, cerebral vascular disease and pregnancy).
- At least 33 States provide limited to extensive dental benefits for adults in Medicaid.
- Medicaid dental benefits for adults are optional and are unfortunately subject to elimination when State budgets are constrained.