

Community Statement on Medicare Coverage for Medically Necessary Oral and Dental Health Therapies

The undersigned organizations are proud to join in support of Medicare coverage for medically-necessary oral/dental health therapies.

It is well established that chronic diseases disproportionately impact Medicare beneficiaries and impose a substantial cost on the federal government. It is also well established that untreated oral microbial infections are closely linked to a wide range of costly chronic conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, dementia, and stroke. In addition, oral diseases have been documented by researchers and medical specialty societies as precluding, delaying, and even jeopardizing medical treatments such as organ and stem cell transplantation, heart valve repair or replacement, cancer chemotherapies, placement of orthopedic prostheses, and management of autoimmune diseases.

Despite these factors, most Medicare beneficiaries do not currently receive oral/dental care even when medically necessary for the treatment of Medicare-covered diseases. In fact, Medicare coverage extends to the treatment of all microbial infections except for those relating to the teeth and periodontium. There is simply no medical justification for this exclusion, especially in light of the broad agreement among medical specialists that such care is integral to the medical management of numerous diseases and medical conditions. Moreover, the lack of medically necessary oral/dental care heightens the risk of costly medical complications, increasing the financial burden on Medicare, beneficiaries, and taxpayers.

At least six major insurance carriers offering dental plans provide enhanced periodontal and preventive coverage to targeted enrollees with conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, head/neck cancers, and transplants. According to some reports, such coverage has realized important benefits, including markedly lower hospitalization and emergency department admission rates as well as substantial cost reductions. On a further note, veterans getting care through the Veterans Health Administration receive medically adjunctive oral/dental treatment in many instances when a dental diagnosis affects their medical prognosis. These are all important steps forward, and medically necessary oral/dental healthcare including periodontal treatment should be provided in traditional Medicare as well.

The Medicare program and all its beneficiaries should not be without the vital clinical and fiscal benefits of coverage for medically necessary oral/dental health therapies. Given the significant potential to improve health outcomes and reduce program costs, we urge Congress and the Administration to explore options for extending such evidence-based coverage for all Medicare beneficiaries.

AARP	Children's Dental Health Project
Acuity Specialists	Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America
American Academy of Maxillofacial Prosthetics	Dental Lifeline Network
American Academy of Periodontology	Dental Trade Alliance
American Association for Dental Research	Eating Disorders Coalition
American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists	Epilepsy Foundation
American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons	Families USA
American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association	Head and Neck Cancer Alliance
American College of Emergency Physicians	Justice in Aging
American College of Gastroenterology	Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
American College of Physicians	Lupus Foundation of America
American College of Prosthodontists	Medicare Rights Center
American College of Rheumatology	Mental Health America
American Dental Association	National Alliance on Mental Illness
American Dental Education Association	National Association of Community Health Centers
American Dental Hygienists' Association	National Association of Dental Plans
American Diabetes Association	National Council for Behavioral Health
American Head and Neck Society	National Kidney Foundation
American Kidney Fund	National Multiple Sclerosis Society
American Liver Foundation	National Network for Oral Health Access
American Nurses Association	National Osteoporosis Foundation
American Parkinson's Disease Association	National Rural Health Association
American Psychiatric Association	National Stroke Association
American Public Health Association	Oral Health America
American Society for Radiation Oncology	Pacific Dental Services Foundation
American Society of Clinical Oncology	Parkinson's Foundation
American Society of Transplant Surgeons	PEW Dental Campaign
American Thoracic Society	Renal Physicians Association
Arthritis Foundation	Santa Fe Group
Association of Dental Support Organizations	School-Based Health Alliance
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors	Support for Persons with Oral, Head, and Neck Cancer
California Dental Association	The Gerontological Society of America
Catholic Health Association of the United States	The Michael J. Fox Foundation
Center for Medicare Advocacy	The Society for Thoracic Surgeons