

A dental benefit in Medicaid for adults with disabilities will improve health, save the state money, reduce opioid addiction

Special to American Institute of Dental Public Health Colloquium, January 2020

More than 400,000 adult Texans in Medicaid receive little to no dental services. When they have dental pain, their only option is the emergency room, where they are treated with antibiotics and pain-killers. Because the real problem remains unaddressed, emergency rooms are being unnecessarily used, state dollars are being unnecessarily spent, a direct pathway for opioid addiction is growing, and employment opportunities for this critical population are impacted.

SOLUTION

Through legislation, instate a dental benefit for this population, not only improving their oral and overall health outcomes, but also making better use of public funds.

Cost to the state is estimated at around \$20M; estimated offsets total at least \$15.9M in reduced emergency room visits, inpatient hospital admissions, and costs associated with diabetes. Other offsets (for which no data is available to produce an estimate) include reduced costs associated with other co-occurring conditions and opioid prescriptions (American Dental Association Health Policy Institute, Estimating the Cost of Introducing a Medicaid Adult Dental Benefit in Texas STAR Plus Program, 2019).

“... most dental-related emergency department visits can and should be diverted to dental offices through access to routine dental care.”

American Dental Association Health Policy Institute Issue Brief, 2015.

Outcome 1: Control costs and save the state money

Average charges of... **	
Preventive dental care in dentist office, community setting	\$200
ER visit	\$1,853
Hospital in-patient for dental	\$46,198

Source: Texas Health Institute, Emergency Department and Inpatient Hospitalizations for Non-Traumatic Dental Conditions in Texas, 2018

** Clinic and hospital charges, not Medicaid payments. Relative costs are similar in Medicaid.

A dental benefit will also **reduce cost of acute care**. Better oral health leads to better overall health (Institute of Medicine’s Advancing Oral Health in America, 2011). Poor oral health can result in increased severity and occurrence of co-occurring conditions, including heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure. A study comparing the cost of acute care in Medicaid adults found savings of 67% for heart disease, 36% for diabetes, and similar savings in a variety of chronic conditions, when those adults had access to preventive dental care (National Association of Dental Providers Analysis Shows Adults with Medicaid Preventive Dental Benefits Have Lower Medical Costs for Chronic Conditions, 2017).

Outcome 2: Obstruct the flow of opioids to the community

Access to preventive dental care will **reduce consumers’ need for and access to opioid prescriptions**, which can lead to addiction. Most Texas Medicaid programs offer emergency-only dental coverage:

consumers can only access care when a problem is so bad, they have to go to the emergency room. In this setting, consumers receive a **medical intervention** of antibiotics and painkillers, often opioids. Nationally, 50.3% of people presenting in ERs for non-traumatic dental pain receive a prescription for opioids (American Journal of Emergency Medicine, January 2018).

The momentum is building...



2017 Texas Legislature passes bill to study a dental benefit for Medicaid adults. Left: CTD's Susie Angel and Senator Lois Kolkhorst in the Senate chamber.

2019 Texas Legislature passes bill to conduct a future dental pilot. 37 organizations go on record in support of a dental benefit, including Texas Dental Assn., Texas Medical Assn., Texas Hospital Assn., Texas Assn. of Health Plans, Texas Oral Health Coalition, Texas Health Institute, Texas Advocates and Texas Impact. Right: Witnesses at hearing of House Human Services Committee.



Goal for 2020/2021: Move forward!

1. Accelerate the dental services pilot.
2. Collect data, improve financial analysis.
3. Expand supporter list.
4. Build on legislative support.
5. Legislative initiative in 2021 session.

Interested? What can you do?

This won't take much time and will cost you nothing. Be willing to:

- Know the issue and talk to others
- Receive updates (like news on pilots, fiscal notes, etc.)
- Communicate to your state senator and state representative why you support services for Medicaid adults with disabilities.

Your first step! Send your contact information and anything else you would like to share to:

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