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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

House Bill 6 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults Health and Government Operations Committee - House of Delegates - February 9, 2022

Thank you Delegate Pendergrass, Vice Chair Pena-Melnyk, and committee members for the time, work, and care that you have put into improving the quality and accessibility of healthcare services for Marylanders of all ages. On Our Own of Maryland is a statewide behavioral health (BH) peer education and advocacy organization. Our network of 20+ affiliated peer-run Wellness & Recovery Centers located throughout the state offer comprehensive, voluntary recovery support services, free of charge, to community members with mental health and substance use disorders. **We are writing to share our strong support of HB 6 which would require the state to provide comprehensive dental care for adults enrolled in Medicaid.**

Dental health is an extremely important part of an individual's overall health and wellness. Poor dental health can lead individuals to face significant stigma when seeking employment and social support, and to struggle with severe dental pain, daily activities like eating meals, and controlling chronic disease. Unfortunately, Maryland is just one of 3 states that does not provide adult dental coverage within Medicaid,¹ leading to that system paying approximately \$10M per year for individuals who receive dental care from the emergency room because they were not able to access preventative dental care.²

As an organization that advocates on behalf of individuals living with BH disorders, we must highlight the great need for dental coverage for people who experience substance use disorders (SUD). Nationally, approximately 68% of those living with a SUD suffer from significant oral health problems including periodontal disease, oral infections, and tooth loss.³ Due to the high cost associated with dental health care and lack of financial resources, these oral health care problems largely go untreated until emergency services are needed. Long-term investments made toward providing preventative dental care would result in better overall health and fewer expensive emergency services being necessary.

Ensuring access to comprehensive oral health care for individuals with SUD can also significantly improve treatment outcomes. A 2019 study demonstrated that such services delivered concurrently with treatment increased sustained engagement and the likelihood of gaining employment at discharge.⁴

The lack of adult dental coverage makes it difficult for our communities to stay healthy, and leads to increased healthcare costs for complications, comorbid health conditions, and emergency services that could have been avoided through preventive care. **We strongly urge you to vote in favor of this important bill to make dental coverage available to the 1 in 4 Marylanders receiving Medicaid.**

¹ Maryland Dental Action Coalition 'It's Time to Close the Gap. Dental Care is Health Care. Support Adult Dental Coverage in Maryland Medicaid' Factsheet https://www.mdac.us/file_download/inline/cb02197e-8b30-470d-9026-13eec383c804

² Ibid #2

³ Hanson GR, McMillan S, Mower K, Bruett CT, Duarte L, Koduri S, Pinzon L, Warthen M, Smith K, Meeks H, Trump B. Comprehensive oral care improves treatment outcomes in male and female patients with high-severity and chronic substance use disorders. J Am Dent Assoc. 2019 Jul;150(7):591-601. doi: 10.1016/j.adaj.2019.02.016. Epub 2019 May 20. PMID: 31122616; PMCID: PMC6599580.

⁴ Ibid #3