



THE COORDINATING CENTER
INSPIRED SOLUTIONS

Committee: House Health and Government Operations Committee

Bill Number: House Bill 6

Hearing Date: February 9, 2022

Position: Support

The Coordinating Center strongly supports *House Bill 6 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults*. The bill establishes adult dental coverage for adults in Medicaid, just as other health care services are covered. Dental care should not be treated differently than somatic care. All individuals covered under Medicaid, or any other type of coverage, should be able to access dental care.

Our organization provides care coordination services for many individuals in home and community-based waivers. We have seen the transformative effect of dental coverage first-hand. In 2018, as a result of the support of your committee, the Maryland General Assembly enacted SB 284 in 2018 to establish dental coverage for dually-eligible individuals under the age of 65. In 2021, even in the midst of the pandemic, over 4,000 people obtained dental services as a result of this legislation. Some of those individuals had forgone dental services for years because of a lack of coverage.

The Coordinating Center has enthusiastically participated in the Medicaid Collaborative, organized by the Maryland Dental Action Coalition. The Collaborative pulls together dental providers, health care professionals, care coordinators, and social service organizations to make dental care a reality for all the people served under the new waiver. With the Collaborative's careful coordination with the Maryland Department of Health, we know that our Maryland community has the experience, expertise, and commitment to support implementation of House Bill 6.

Recent analysis of Emergency Department data in Maryland by CareQuest, Institute for Oral Health demonstrates that investing in quality dental coverage for adults in Medicaid will lead to less costly options for care that can prevent oral diseases or treat infections before they become more serious or life-threatening resulting in significant cost for Maryland's Emergency Departments.

- Although Medicaid members comprise only 17% of Maryland adults, they account for 54% of all the state's ED visits for NTDCs and 46% of total cost.
- Maryland continues to have rates of adult ED visits for NTDCs that exceed the national average.

- Like in other states, younger adults are much more likely to visit hospital EDs for NTDCs than older adults in Maryland. In 2019, the rate of visits among adults aged 20-34 was more than double the rate among those aged 45 or older.

Poor oral health has been linked to an increase in heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Lastly, from socio-economic perspective, lack of access to oral health care leads to things like poorer school performance and consequent reduced employment opportunities, low self-esteem and social isolation. Passing of this bill is a vital part of helping individuals move forward towards self-sufficiency, gainful employment and improved quality of life.

We ask for a favorable report. Please let us know if we can provide any support for your consideration of this crucial legislation by contacting Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.