



HB 6 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults

Committee: Health and Government Operations

Date: February 9, 2022

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Coalition of Families: Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) helps families who care for someone with behavioral health needs. Using personal experience, our staff provide one-to-one peer support and navigation services to family members with a loved one with a mental health, substance use or gambling issue.

MCF strongly supports HB 6.

Adults with behavioral health disorders often receive their health care coverage through Maryland Medicaid. Frequently, a person's serious mental illness or substance use disorder precludes them from holding down more than a low-paying job, if that.

People with serious mental illness are at greater risk of oral health problems because of poor nutrition and oral hygiene, the heavy consumption of sugary drinks, and comorbid substance use disorders. People with serious mental illness are 2.7 times more likely to have lost all of their teeth when compared to the general population.

People with serious substance use disorders too often have poor nutrition and oral hygiene habits. Moreover, the use of certain substances are known to have disastrous consequences on a person's teeth. Some of the effects of substance use include:

- Dry mouth, which increases acid in the mouth and leads to rotting enamel
- Acid reflux
- Grinding teeth
- Loss of blood flow to roots and gums
- Ulcers or sores in the mouth that can become infected

Poor oral health has been linked with systemic illnesses such as coronary heart disease, diabetes and respiratory disease, conditions that we know people with serious mental illness suffer from at rates much higher than the general population, and die 25 years earlier on average than the general population.

For these reasons (along with others that will be noted by others who are testifying), it is imperative that Maryland include adequate dental coverage in the state's Medicaid plans. Oral health is inextricably linked with physical health. We have a responsibility, particularly to those who suffer from serious mental illness or substance use disorders, to treat the whole person. In the end, this will save costs incurred in avoidable emergency room visits and physical health care costs.

Therefore we urge a favorable report on HB 6.

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