



House Health & Government Operations Committee  
February 9, 2022

House Bill 6  
Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults  
Support

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*Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the pre-existing opioid overdose death fatality crisis has worsened. In Maryland, the number of opioid-related deaths increased by 20% between 2019 and 2020, and preliminary data indicates a continued increase in 2021.*

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The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) supports House Bill 6 to create a comprehensive dental benefit for adults enrolled in Maryland Medicaid.

Recent studies have shown a strong relationship between oral health and substance use disorders (SUDs). On the one hand, the inability for someone to obtain routine dental care can lead to unattended problems that cause pain. As with any pain, many people self-medicate and use of opioids – legal or illicit – can lead to a substance use disorder.

Substance use itself can lead to dental and gum problems. Tobacco use has long been known to contribute to various oral health problems. The increase in use of e-cigarette produces, especially among adolescents, is leading to more oral health problems. Other substances such as methamphetamines also create significant problems.

A 2019 study out of the Journal of the American Dental Association entitled “Comprehensive oral care improves treatment outcomes in male and female patients with high-severity and chronic substance use disorders,” shows comprehensive oral health care improves SUD treatment outcomes. “Integrated comprehensive oral health care of major dental problems significantly improves treatment outcomes in patients whose disorders are particularly difficult to manage, such as patients with SUDs.” (Hanson, McMillan, et al, July 2019)

Finally, poor oral health can have a negative impact on people in recovery. When a person is unable to get care, pain resulting from dental or gum problems can lead to relapse. When people have poor dental conditions, the lack of self-confidence can prove to be barriers to good nutrition and even in obtaining employment.

It's time for Maryland to join the other 47 state in this country that provide dental benefits to adults enrolled in Medicaid. **We urge your support of House Bill 6.**