



Testimony on HB 6
Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults
House Health & Government Operations Committee
February 9, 2022
POSITION: SUPPORT

The Community Behavioral Health Association of Maryland (CBH) is the leading voice for community-based providers serving the mental health and addiction needs of vulnerable Marylanders. Our 95 members serve the majority of those accessing care through the public behavioral health system. CBH members provide outpatient and residential treatment for mental health and addiction-related disorders, day programs, case management, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), employment supports, and crisis intervention.

CBH supports expanded access to dental coverage for adults. A large portion of individuals served through CBH member organizations have severe mental illness, or SMI. Individuals with SMI have increased rates of tooth decay, gum disease, and periodontal disease because of poor nutrition and oral hygiene, comorbid substance use disorders, and financial barriers to care. Poor oral health has significant impacts on quality of life for people with serious mental illness and can lead to heightened isolation, social withdrawal, and low self-esteem ¹.

Coordinating successful behavioral health interventions includes addressing the oral health needs of behavioral health patients. Every day our members see the first-hand consequences of insufficient access to oral health care that leads to pain, discomfort, and additional stress on their clients. With a limited pool of free or low-cost dental clinics and mobile dental programs in the state there is only so much that can be done outside of seeking care in emergency settings.

Expanding Maryland Medicaid to cover adult dental care will provide much needed resources to improve the preventive and emergent oral health care needs of Marylanders in the public behavioral health system.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ Kisely S. No Mental Health without Oral Health. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*. 2016 May; 61(5): 277–282.