

I'm Dr Diane Romaine, Past President of the MSDA, serve as dental representative for the MD PDMP TAC and am a general dentist in Frostburg MD,.... daily in my practice I see people suffering from dental problems, and often because they are low income and have no insurance I am not their first stop. Too many times their one and only stop, is to go where their Medicaid covers a visit, to a physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner in a primary care practice or emergency department.

Studies show that only half of patients who visit an emergency department (ED) with a toothache ultimately see a dentist within 6 months of their ED visit, and 21% of patients with a toothache-related ED visit return to the ED for the same problem after months of self-medicating.

I'll remind you that in Maryland prescription opioids are now the number two cause of overdose death after fentanyl having surpassed heroin in 2021 even though rates of prescribing by dentists are down.

Maryland's lack of an adult dental Medicaid program contributes to the pain, poor health, shame, lost hours of work and suffering caused by untreated dental disease.

Poor oral health affects other health outcomes, including diabetes, heart disease, pulmonary disease and cancer to name just a few. Some studies even suggest that providing dental treatment to high-risk patients with these conditions might reduce overall health care costs, rates of hospital admission and promote economic productivity among working-age adults

Former US Surgeon General David Satcher said more than 20 years ago that “you cannot be healthy without oral health.” Certainly, we have made progress in Maryland improving oral health for children, pregnant women and most recently dual eligible adults, but for working-age adults and seniors, disparities in oral health outcomes and in access to dental care have widened by income and race. Treating dental care as essential in Maryland Medicaid health policy—for all ages—is the only way to address these challenges.

Oral health itself is critically important to human dignity and well-being and I ask for your favorable report of HB6