

Community Statement on Medicare Coverage for Medically Necessary Oral and Dental Health Therapies

The undersigned organizations are proud to join in support of Medicare coverage for medically-necessary oral/dental health therapies.

It is well established that chronic diseases disproportionately impact Medicare beneficiaries and impose a substantial cost on the federal government. It is also well established that untreated oral microbial infections are closely linked to a wide range of costly chronic conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, dementia, and stroke. In addition, oral diseases have been documented by researchers and medical specialty societies as precluding, delaying, and even jeopardizing medical treatments such as organ and stem cell transplantation, heart valve repair or replacement, cancer chemotherapies, placement of orthopedic prostheses, and management of autoimmune diseases.

Despite these factors, most Medicare beneficiaries do not currently receive oral/dental care even when medically necessary for the treatment of Medicare-covered diseases. In fact, Medicare coverage extends to the treatment of all microbial infections except for those relating to the teeth and periodontium. There is simply no medical justification for this exclusion, especially in light of the broad agreement among medical specialists that such care is integral to the medical management of numerous diseases and medical conditions. Moreover, the lack of medically necessary oral/dental care heightens the risk of costly medical complications, increasing the financial burden on Medicare, beneficiaries, and taxpayers.

At least six major insurance carriers offering dental plans provide enhanced periodontal and preventive coverage to targeted enrollees with conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, head/neck cancers, and transplants. According to some reports, such coverage has realized important benefits, including markedly lower hospitalization and emergency department admission rates as well as substantial cost reductions. On a further note, veterans getting care through the Veterans Health Administration receive medically adjunctive oral/dental treatment in many instances when a dental diagnosis affects their medical prognosis. These are all important steps forward, and medically necessary oral/dental healthcare including periodontal treatment should be provided in traditional Medicare as well.

The Medicare program and all its beneficiaries should not be without the vital clinical and fiscal benefits of coverage for medically necessary oral/dental health therapies. Given the significant potential to improve health outcomes and reduce program costs, we urge Congress and the Administration to explore options, including utilization of existing authority, for extending such evidence-based coverage for all Medicare beneficiaries.

- AARP
- Acuity Specialists
- American Academy of Maxillofacial Prosthetics
- American Academy of Periodontology
- American Association for Dental Research
- American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists
- American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons
- American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association
- American College of Emergency Physicians
- American College of Gastroenterology
- American College of Physicians
- American College of Prosthodontists
- American College of Rheumatology
- American Dental Association
- American Dental Education Association
- American Dental Hygienists' Association
- American Diabetes Association
- American Head and Neck Society
- American Kidney Fund
- American Liver Foundation
- American Nurses Association
- American Parkinson's Disease Association
- American Psychiatric Association
- American Public Health Association
- American Society for Radiation Oncology
- American Society of Clinical Oncology
- American Society of Transplant Surgeons
- American Thoracic Society
- Arthritis Foundation
- Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
- California Dental Association
- Catholic Health Association
- Center for Medicare Advocacy
- Children's Dental Health Project
- Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America
- Dental Lifeline Network
- Dental Trade Alliance
- Eating Disorders Coalition
- Epilepsy Foundation
- Families USA
- Head and Neck Cancer Alliance
- Justice in Aging
- Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
- Lupus Foundation of America
- Medicare Rights Center
- Mental Health America
- National Alliance on Mental Illness
- National Association of Community Health Centers
- National Association of Dental Plans
- National Council for Behavioral Health
- National Kidney Foundation
- National Multiple Sclerosis Society
- National Network for Oral Health Access
- National Osteoporosis Foundation
- National Rural Health Association
- National Stroke Association
- Oral Health America
- Pacific Dental Services Foundation
- Parkinson's Foundation
- PEW Dental Campaign
- Renal Physicians Association
- Santa Fe Group
- School-Based Health Alliance
- Support for Persons with Oral, Head, and Neck Cancer
- The Michael J. Fox Foundation
- The Society for Thoracic Surgeons