

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 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 Association of Kidney Patients
American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association
American College of Cardiology
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 Disease Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Public Health Association
American Society for Radiation Oncology
American Society of Clinical Oncology
American Society of Nephrology
American Society of Transplant Surgeons
American Society of Transplantation
American Thoracic Society
Arthritis Foundation
Association of Community Cancer Centers
Association of Dental Support Organizations
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
California Dental Association
Catholic Health Association of the United States
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
John A. Hartford Foundation
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 Area Agencies on Aging
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Association of Dental Plans
National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention
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
Society for Transplant Social Workers
Support for Persons with Oral, Head, and Neck Cancer
The Gerontological Society of America
The Michael J. Fox Foundation
The Society for Thoracic Surgeons