



January 3, 2019

The Honorable Benjamin Cardin
509 Hart Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cardin:

On behalf of Families USA, Oral Health America, Justice in Aging, and the Center for Medicare Advocacy-four of the leading organizations on oral health, health care consumer, and senior health issues in the nation -we are writing to express our support for your legislation the Medicare Dental Benefit Act, which amends title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for coverage of dental services under the Medicare program.

Two-thirds of the elderly and disabled persons in the Medicare program, often living on fixed incomes, do not have oral health coverage. These individuals struggle to afford and receive oral health care services. When they forgo care, their overall health suffers, worsening both oral health conditions that are often painful and other health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity for which consistent oral health care can help improve outcomes. As a result, this critical gap in oral coverage can lead to the Medicare program paying for costly, preventable medical problems that are the consequences of unmet oral health care needs. Expanding Medicare to include oral health coverage is a critical step in the health and wellbeing of elderly and disabled persons as well as improving their financial security.

Our organizations are particularly supportive of provisions in your bill that provide a direct extension of the Medicare Part B benefit to include oral health coverage. To provide older adults and persons with disabilities with the care they need, it is critical that the coverage of oral health services is treated the same way as other health services in the Medicare program. This approach is consistent with the growing recognition that oral health care should be more fully integrated into health care delivery, both in Medicare and more broadly in the health care system. It also ensures that this coverage will be available to all Medicare recipients that need it, not just those who can afford to pay out of pocket for care or additional premiums for insurance.

Your legislation also would ensure that the new Medicare oral health care benefit is sufficiently comprehensive. As we've seen in state Medicaid programs, variations in the comprehensiveness of coverage matters to health outcomes, access to care, and provider participation rates. We are encouraged to see the robust benefit laid out in your bill, which will best support the goal of genuinely improved care and financial security.

The Medicare Dental Benefit Act of 2019 serves as an important opportunity for Congress to take a major step to improve the oral health, overall health and well-being, and financial security of seniors and people with disabilities in this country. Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,



Frederick Isasi
Executive Director, Families USA



Kevin Prindiville
Executive Director, Justice in Aging



Judith Stein
Executive Director, Center for Medicare Advocacy



Beth Truett
President & CEO, Oral Health America