

December 12, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer,

On behalf of Families USA, Justice in Aging, and the Center for Medicare Advocacy-- three of the leading organizations on oral health, health care consumer, and senior health issues in the nation--we are writing to encourage the Senate to prioritize adding dental coverage to Medicare in this Congress. This week, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 3, the *Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act*, which included a provision that amends title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for coverage of dental services under the Medicare program. **On behalf of millions of seniors and people with disabilities in need of better access to oral health care, we strongly urge Senate leadership to move forward with legislation to add dental coverage to Medicare, even if the Senate does not take up the House's prescription drug package.**

Expanding Medicare to include oral health coverage is an essential step to improving the health, wellbeing, and financial security of older adults and people with disabilities as well as reducing avoidable health care costs. Two-thirds of people who rely on the Medicare program for their health care do not have oral health coverage. These individuals often live on fixed incomes and struggle to afford and receive oral health care services. The lack of coverage disproportionately affects populations of color, individuals with disabilities, and individuals living in rural areas, leading to significant disparities in oral health outcomes.

This 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. When older adults and people with disabilities cannot afford to get the dental care they need, their overall health suffers. They are unable to get the oral health treatment that can help improve outcomes for many other health conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Moreover, when oral health care is out of reach, many people have no choice but to turn to expensive emergency room settings for relief.

Medicare oral health coverage is also incredibly popular, with recent polls showing strong support from voters of all political parties, in all regions of the country, and of all ages. Seven out of 10 voters support adding oral health coverage to Medicare, including 87% of voters who identify as liberal, 75% of moderates and 56% of conservatives. In a time when divisions between political parties often define public discourse, the strong support for adding oral health coverage to Medicare is striking.

The passage of H.R. 3 in the House provides an excellent opportunity for Congress to act to improve the oral health, overall health and well-being, and financial security of seniors and people with disabilities in this country. We encourage Senate leadership to take up legislation to add oral health coverage to Medicare in this Congress.

Sincerely,

Families USA
Justice in Aging
Center for Medicare Advocacy

Cc: The Honorable Chuck Grassley, Chair, Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Ron Wyden, Ranking Member, Senate Finance Committee