



Guiding Principles

While Medicare was established to provide for the health and well-being of older adults and people with disabilities and reduce medical debt, it leaves out a critical component of achieving these goals — oral health. Two thirds of the nearly 60 million people who rely on the Medicare program do not have coverage for oral health care. Poor oral health is associated with diabetes, heart disease, stroke, poor mental health, and even Alzheimer's, yet Medicare enrollees often cannot afford the dental care that would help them stay healthy. Poor oral health can cause pain and infections, and effect a person's quality of life, self-image, employment prospects, and nutrition. Adding comprehensive, affordable oral health coverage to Medicare would be a popular, needed, and wise investment in the health of people over the age of 65 and people with disabilities.

The following principles articulate the coalition's shared vision of necessary steps to meet the oral health needs of older adults and people with disabilities Medicare beneficiaries in the United States.

1. Everyone should have access to the comprehensive, affordable, accessible oral health care that they need to live healthy and productive lives.
2. All Medicare enrollees should have affordable, comprehensive oral health coverage as part of their overall health coverage. Oral health coverage should be integrated into the existing Medicare structure to ensure that comprehensive health care is available to every Medicare enrollee.
3. Medicare oral health coverage should support access to care in all communities. Specifically, oral health services should be a part of all Medicare enrollees' coverage. Any policies around coverage implementation should work to address the large barriers that many communities, including people with disabilities, communities of color, rural communities, low-income communities, and others, face in accessing oral health care that they need.