

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 Diabetes Educators
 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 Geriatrics Society
 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
 Cornerstone Dental Specialties
 Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America
 Dental Lifeline Network
 Dental Trade Alliance
 DentaQuest Partnership for Oral Health Advancement
 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 Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
 National Association of Social Workers (NASW)
 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
 Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association
 ProHEALTH Dental
 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