

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 health care providers 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.

A number of major insurance carriers provide medically-necessary oral and dental 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 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
 Adenoid Cystic Carcinoma Research Foundation
 AIDS Foundation of Chicago
 Allies for Independence
 American Academy of Nursing
 American Academy of Periodontology
 American Association for Dental Research
 American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists
 American Association of Colleges of Nursing
 American Association of Diabetes Educators
 American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons
 American Association of Kidney Patients
 American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons
 American Association of Nurse Practitioners
 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 Rheumatology
 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 Medical Association
 American Nephrology Nurses' Association
 American Network of Oral Health Coalitions
 American Nurses Association
 American Parkinson Disease Association
 American Psychiatric Association
 American Psychiatric Nurses 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
 Arcora Foundation
 Arthritis Foundation
 Association of Community Cancer Centers
 Association of Dental Support Organizations
 Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
 Autistic Self Advocacy Network
 Brain Injury Association of America
 California Dental Association
 California Medical Association
 Catholic Health Association of the United States
 Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation
 Center for Medicare Advocacy
 Children's Dental Health Project
 Coalition for Oral Health for the Aging
 Cornerstone Dental Specialties
 Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America
 Dental Lifeline Network
 Dental Trade Alliance
 DentaQuest Partnership for Oral Health Advancement
 Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
 Eating Disorders Coalition
 Epilepsy Foundation
 Families USA
 Georgia AIDS Coalition
 Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association
 Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing
 Head and Neck Cancer Alliance
 Henry Schein Cares Foundation
 HIV Medicine Association
 Hispanic Dental Association
 International Pemphigus and Pemphigoid Foundation
 John A. Hartford Foundation
 Justice in Aging
 Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
 Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
 Lupus Foundation of America
 Medicare Rights Center
 Mended Hearts
 Mental Health America
 myNEXUS
 National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors
 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
 National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities

National Comprehensive Cancer Network
National Committee to Preserve Social Security
and Medicare
National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Dental Association
National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Health Law Program
National Interprofessional Initiative on Oral Health
National Kidney Foundation
National League for Nursing
National Medical Association
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Network for Oral Health Access
National Osteoporosis Foundation
National Rural Health Association
National Stroke Association
North American Transplant Coordinators Organization
Nursing Interventions for Health System Elders
Oncology Nursing Society
Oral Cancer Foundation
Oral Health America
Oral Health Nursing Education and Practice Program
Pacific Dental Services Foundation
Parkinson's Foundation
Patient-Centered Primary Care Collaborative
PEW Dental Campaign
Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association
ProHEALTH Dental
Renal Physicians Association
Santa Fe Group
School-Based Health Alliance
Scleroderma Foundation
Sjogren's Syndrome Foundation
Society for Transplant Social Workers
Support for People with Oral and Head and Neck Cancer
The AIDS Institute
The Arc of the United States
The Gerontological Society of America
The Michael J. Fox Foundation
The Society for Thoracic Surgeons
The TMJ Association
Trust for America's Health
WomenHeart, The National Coalition for Women with
Heart Disease