



Senate Bill 150 Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Dental Coverage for Adults
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FAVORABLE

As a family physician who cares for many people with substance use disorders (SUDs), I regularly witness how Medicaid expansion has helped my patients. This has changed the lives of thousands of Marylanders with SUDs as well as hepatitis C, HIV, depression, heart failure, and other conditions.

However, for many patients, I am unable to help with one of their most pressing needs: dental care. Unlike almost every other Medicaid expansion state, Maryland Medicaid denies access to dental care.

People with Substance Use Disorder are disproportionately affected by dental problems.¹

In addition to direct dental effects of many drugs, oral hygiene is an area of general functioning that is often impaired by SUD. Patients in the throes of addiction often have impairments in occupational and social functioning, and physical health as well.

All those who interact with people affected by SUD are very well aware that **addictions go hand in hand with dental problems**. These problems cause chronic and acute problem with severe **pain, infection, and social embarrassment**. Dental problems are often quite obvious and can be a real **barrier in applying for jobs**. They often cause **lack of confidence in re-establishing relationships** with others.

*Dental pain can be a **factor in relapse when patients feel the need to self-medicate for pain.***

For a great many of our patients with SUD, dental care is on their treatment plan. It is a necessary part of their overall recovery, allowing them to become re-integrate into society.

Historically, dental insurance has been artificially separated from general medical care in the U.S., which has no basis in medical science.

Fundamentally, expanding **coverage of dental care is an issue of equity**. People of color and low-income communities have been systematically denied comprehensive preventative and restorative dental care¹, predisposing them to further dental problems and all of the resulting sequelae. Failure to cover dental health in MD Medicare **would be inconsistent with the General Assembly's demonstrated commitment to equity**.

Reference 1. National Institutes of Health. Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges. Bethesda, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, 2021