



June 13, 2024



To the Members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly:

In 2011, the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (now DHS) issued a bulletin implementing a cumbersome benefit limit exception (BLE) process that significantly reduced access to dental benefits for the adult Medicaid population. These cuts aimed to save state dollars, but they have made it difficult for many to receive the necessary dental care for a healthy and productive life. The increased threshold of medical necessity for routine procedures has led to more pain, costly care, and irreversible damage to overall health.

Instead of saving \$18.9 million in the state budget, these cuts have generally increased medical costs as Pennsylvanians sought oral health relief in more intensive settings like emergency departments. Treating a condition in an emergency department is three times more costly than in a dental office. Additionally, emergency departments provide only temporary relief, leading to recurring visits.

House Bill 1417 amends the Human Services Code and directs the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services to restore the adult dental Medicaid benefit to its pre-2011 state. The House Committee on Appropriations projected the cost to be \$19.8 million in state funds.

Since the cuts in 2011, observed consequences include:

- 1. Increased Costs:** Emergency department visits for dental issues in Pennsylvania cost over \$35 million annually, with spending increasing by over 60% since 2010. Hospital inpatient treatment for oral diseases, nearly ten times more expensive than dental office treatment, has more than doubled from 2010 to 2016. Medicaid has spent over \$5 million on potentially avoidable emergency visits for dental problems since 2017. The American Dental Association estimates that up to 79% of emergency dental visits could be treated in dental offices at less than half the cost, potentially saving millions in medical costs.
- 2. Increased Administrative Burdens:** The current BLE process results in thousands of hours spent on denials and grievances each year. Only 23% of general dentists in Pennsylvania now accept Medicaid, with just 7.9% actively seeing Medicaid patients, leading to inadequate provider networks and undue pressure on safety net clinics, especially in rural areas where there can be two-year waiting lists for an appointment.
- 3. Poor Overall Health for Pennsylvanians:** Untreated oral disease can lead to severe health problems, including heart disease, stroke, and





Pennsylvania Health Access Network



diabetes. Over 40% of low-income adults suffer from untreated dental issues, and 1 in 8 Pennsylvanians over 65 have no remaining teeth, impacting their nutrition. Children with parents who regularly visit the dentist are 13 times more likely to receive dental care themselves, highlighting the importance of regular dental visits for overall health.

The undersigned organizations join the Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health in calling on the Pennsylvania General Assembly to pass HB 1417. The current process places harmful limits and excess costs on the state's healthcare infrastructure. Restoring the adult dental benefit in Medicaid will improve access to standard dental care, enhance overall health and productivity, and decrease medical costs for all Pennsylvanians.

Achieva

- Allegheny Health Network Center for Inclusion Health**
- Center for Population Health**
- Free Clinic Association of Pennsylvania**
- Harmony Health Foundation**
- Harrisburg Area Community College Dental Hygiene Student Organization**
- Harrisburg Area Community College**
- HealthLink Dental Clinic**
- Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine**
- Latino Connection**
- Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health**
- Pennsylvania Academy of General Dentistry**
- Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers**
- Pennsylvania College of Emergency Physicians**
- Pennsylvania Dental Assistants Association**
- Pennsylvania Dental Association**
- Pennsylvania Dental Hygienists' Association**
- Pennsylvania Health Access Network**
- Pennsylvania Health Law Project**
- Pennsylvania Rural Health Association**
- Perfect Smile Dental**
- Put People First! PA**
- Rehabilitation and Community Providers Association**
- Sigma Phi Alpha - Kappa Chapter, Temple University**
- Special Smiles, LTD**
- Temple University Kornberg School of Dentistry**
- The Arc of Greater Pittsburgh**
- The Arc of Pennsylvania**
- The Autism Connection of PA**
- The Wright Center**
- Volunteers in Medicine, Wilkes Barre**