



Reinstate Michigan's Medicaid Adult Dental Benefit

2010 Michigan Primary Care Association Legislative Priorities

ISSUE:

Have you ever heard the expression “the eyes are the window to the soul”? Well, the mouth is the window to the body’s overall health. Michigan Primary Care Association recognizes that good oral health is vital to maintaining strong overall health.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Michigan must reinstate oral health services for Medicaid adults. The impact on health and the cost to the health care system is too significant to ignore.

BACKGROUND:

On July 1, 2009, the Medicaid adult dental benefit was eliminated by an Executive Order from Governor Jennifer Granholm. While eliminating oral health benefits for Medicaid adults is estimated to save \$5 million in up-front general fund savings, we believe the actual cost to be much higher.

- Michigan will lose \$16 million in federal matching dollars to pay dental providers to provide care in the appropriate setting
- People with untreated dental disease end up in hospital emergency rooms, which is far more costly than seeing a dentist
- Providing preventive care makes wise use of Michigan’s limited resources, preventive care costs much less than restorative care
- In the first six months following elimination of the Medicaid adult dental benefit in 2003, Medicaid emergency room visits related to oral health increased 11% compared to the same six-month period the previous year

DISCUSSION:

Good oral health care is extremely important in preventing, diagnosing and treating both oral and primary health care needs of patients. Below are some documented examples of how poor oral health affects a state and the nation’s health:

- Pre-term births (before 35 weeks) increase
- Diabetes is more difficult, if not impossible, to control
- Incidence of arteriosclerosis (narrowing of blood vessels that can lead to a heart attack or stroke) increases
- Heart disease rates increase
- Incidence of low birth weight infants increases
- Incidence of dental caries in children increases by inoculation from untreated dental caries in their parents
- Morbidity and death from oral cancer increases
- Incidence and suffering from dental disease increases
- Employability declines



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We should also learn from the past—when the Medicaid adult dental benefit was eliminated in 2003, it had far reaching impacts on the state’s safety net infrastructure. Providers were forced to ration care for everyone; clinics had to reduce services or close altogether, which reduced access to care for both adults and their children; Medicaid allowed dentists to only provide third-world standards of care by just pulling teeth; jobs in the dental care field were put in jeopardy; the participation of many clinics in clinical education programs was discontinued; and equipment and facilities were underutilized.

We need to recognize that dentists are not simply tooth technicians and that oral health care is not secondary but intrinsic to good health. Reinstating the Medicaid adult dental benefit is the fiscally and morally responsible choice.

ABOUT MICHIGAN COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS:

For over 30 years, Michigan’s Community, Migrant, HIV/AIDS and Homeless Health Centers have been delivering comprehensive primary care to the medically underserved communities of our state. Michigan’s 32 Community Health Center organizations form an essential component of the state’s safety net and provide comprehensive health care services at more than 160 different locations. These organizations are on the front lines of health care serving the most vulnerable populations in rural and inner city communities. Nearly 40% of Health Center patients are uninsured; two-thirds are of racial and ethnic minority groups; nearly 70% have family incomes at or below poverty level; and half live in rural areas. Community Health Centers provide high quality, comprehensive health care services to federally designated medically underserved areas/populations.



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