

Senate Bill 169 - Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Cost of Emergency Room Visits to Treat Dental Conditions - Study
Senate Finance Committee
February 1, 2017
SUPPORT

Consumer Health First (formerly the Maryland Women’s Coalition for Health Care Reform), is a nonpartisan, statewide alliance of thousands of individuals and one hundred organizations working to promote health equity through access to high-quality, comprehensive and affordable health care for all Marylanders. We appreciate the opportunity to provide our support for Senate Bill 169 – *Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Cost of Emergency Room Visits to Treat Dental Conditions - Study*.

SB 169 requires the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to conduct a study to determine the annual cost of emergency room visits to treat dental conditions of adults enrolled in Medical Assistance. A report of the study is due by December 1, 2017, and must be shared with the General Assembly and any local stakeholders or coalitions with an interest in using the data for their region to improve dental services for Medical Assistance adult enrollees.

Poor oral health affects a majority of adults in the United States. Almost all adults ages 20 to 64 have had dental caries, or cavities. Those with incomes below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) are more than 3 times as likely to have untreated dental cavities than those with incomes above 400% of FPL.¹ Untreated and preventable oral disease can lead to the need for emergency treatment and can exacerbate and/or contribute to complications of other medical conditions.

Currently, about two-thirds of states have an established Medicaid adult dental benefit, ranging from emergency only to more comprehensive preventive, restorative and periodontal services, dentures, and oral surgery.²

Oregon found that when the adult dental benefits were removed from Medicaid, the number of emergency department dental claims increased resulting in a reduction in expected savings and as a result Oregon reinstated this coverage.

¹Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, *Medicaid Coverage of Dental Benefits for Adults*, <https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Medicaid-Coverage-of-Dental-Benefits-for-Adults.pdf>

² The Hilltop Institute, *Adult Dental Coverage in Maryland Medicaid*, <http://www.hilltopinstitute.org/publications/AdultDentalCoverageInMarylandMedicaid-Feb2016.pdf>.

Other studies have found that emergency departments are often unable to treat the underlying dental condition resulting in repeat visits and added costs.³

A comprehensive study of emergency department claims resulting from dental issues will give policymakers and others valuable information to assess the cost and benefit – both in terms of dollars and personal health – of requiring a more generous adult dental benefit to Medicaid recipients.

For this reason, Consumer Health First asks for your support of Senate Bill 169 and urges a favorable report.

³ The Hilltop Institute, Adult Dental Coverage in Maryland Medicaid, <http://www.hilltopinstitute.org/publications/AdultDentalCoverageInMarylandMedicaid-Feb2016.pdf>.