

# HB 1772 HD 2 LATE

**Measure Title:** RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH.

**Report Title:** Oral Health; Dental Benefits; Medicaid and QUEST Integration Enrollees; Appropriation (\$)

**Description:** Appropriates funds to the department of human services to restore basic adult dental benefits to medicaid and QUEST integration enrollees. (HB1772 HD2)

**Companion:**

**Package:** None

**Current Referral:** HMS/CPH, WAM

**Introducer(s):** MORIKAWA, CREAGAN, EVANS, ING, JOHANSON, KAWAKAMI, KOBAYASHI, LOWEN, MIZUNO, SAIKI, TAKUMI, DeCoite, Hashem, Nakashima, Onishi, Oshiro



# DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD **LATE**

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March 17, 2016

## TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON HUMAN SERVICES AND COMMERCE, CONSUMER PROTECTION, AND HEALTH

### House Bill 1772, HD2 - Relating to Oral Health

The Disability and Communication Access Board supports House Bill 1772, HD2 - Relating to Oral Health. The purpose of the bill is to appropriate funds to the Department of Human Services to restore basic adult dental benefits to Medicaid and QUEST integration enrollees.

Many adults with disabilities are low income and underserved who are also included as Medicaid and the QUEST integration enrollees. They are in great need of dental services beyond emergency extractions that has been provided since 1996. Good oral care is necessary to sustain the physical and psychological well being of every person, including people with disabilities.

We defer to the Department of Human Services regarding the amount of funding that would be necessary to restore adult dental services to enrollees in both of these programs.

We acknowledge the Legislature for opening the discussion on this important health issue and look forward to a positive outcome for the enhancement of oral and psychological health for the whole community.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

BARBARA FISCHLOWITZ-LEONG  
Chairperson  
Legislative Committee

FRANCINE WAI  
Executive Director



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March 17, 2016

Sen. Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair  
Senator Roslyn Baker, Chair  
Sen. Gil Riviere, Vice-Chair  
Sen. Michelle Kidani, Vice Chair  
Committees on Human Services and Consumer Protection & Commerce

**Re: HB No. 1772, HD2 Oral Health; Dental Benefits; Medicaid and QUEST Integration Enrollees; Appropriation**

DentaQuest appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill No. 1772, HD2 (HB 1772, HD2), to appropriate funding for basic adult dental coverage in the state's Medicaid and QUEST programs. DentaQuest strongly supports this legislation and its goal to promote oral health for all in Hawaii. This bill will help to dramatically improve access to care and reduce health disparities.

DentaQuest had the honor of serving the children of Hawaii as a subcontractor for the Medicaid QUEST dental program between 2012 and 2015. We continue to build partnerships with the Hawaii health and advocacy community by working with Hawaii nonprofits like Helping Hands Hawaii and Aloha Medical Mission. Like DentaQuest, these organizations work to improve health outcomes and to build stronger communities.

DentaQuest is the second largest dental benefits company and the largest Medicaid and CHIP dental benefits administrator in the country. Nationwide, we work with seven state agencies, partner with 100 health plans, and offer plans on ten health insurance exchanges to provide dental benefits to more than 24 million beneficiaries. Along with the DentaQuest Foundation, DentaQuest Institute, and DentaQuest Care Group, our organization is committed to improving the oral health of all.

As HB 1772, HD2 notes, Hawaii struggles to ensure optimal oral health for low-income Hawaii residents. Based on 2014 HEDIS measures, which are one of the most widely used set of health care performance measurement in the U.S. – Hawaii ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> for the percentage of Medicaid-eligible children receiving preventive dental care. The state's Department of Health noted that in 2012, only 52 percent of low-income individuals saw a dentist compared to 82 percent for higher-income individuals. These inequities are not unique to Hawaii. Poor access to dental care is a systemic issue facing our nation.

Dental caries—a preventable condition—is the most common chronic disease among children. Adults do not fare much better: according to a National Institute of Health (NIH) study, 92 percent of adults 20-64 years of age have had dental caries at one point and 5 percent of adults have no teeth left at all. If left unchecked, preventable dental disease can lead to increased health care spending – through complex procedures, expensive pain medications or emergency department treatments. Funding Medicaid adult dental benefits is critical to improve the health of Hawaii's most vulnerable.

DentaQuest submits testimony today in support of HB 1772, HD2 for a number of reasons:

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(1) *Medicaid adult dental coverage can lead to increased access to care for adults and their children.* According to a Delta Dental Oral Health Report in 2010, individuals with dental coverage are 42 percent more likely to have a dental checkup within a year than individuals without coverage. Similarly, research from Oral Health Colorado shows that when adults have coverage, their children are more likely to receive care too. Medicaid adult dental benefits are a critical piece to ensuring that individuals and their children receive appropriate dental care.

(2) *Reducing or eliminating Medicaid adult dental benefits has led to significant increases in dental emergency department visits and associated costs in some states.*

Several states have shown increases in emergency department costs when Medicaid adult dental benefits are cut. California eliminated Medicaid dental benefits for adults in 2009. Over the course of the next few years, emergency room visits for oral health problems increased by 1,800 per year, leading to \$1.3 million in increased emergency room expenditures. Oregon's emergency room costs for oral health services doubled when the state cut Medicaid dental benefits, while Maryland saw a 12 percent spike in costs.

When people seek care for oral health issues in the emergency department, providers typically treat patients' pain—offering temporary relief when preventive and restorative care is needed to stop decay and eliminate disease. Medicaid adult dental benefits will not simply increase access to care, but can decrease costs and improve the quality of care as well.

(3) *Ensuring low-income adults have access to comprehensive dental coverage can improve employability, decrease work days lost due to dental-related illnesses, and help to reduce health disparities.*

The lack of dental care for Medicaid populations can create further economic barriers. Oral health is linked to employability and lost work days from untreated conditions, both of which are incredible obstacles for low-income families. Among adults, 164 million work hours are lost each year due to dental-related illnesses.

Oral health conditions already affect lower socioeconomic populations and racial minorities at disproportionate levels. The Hawaii State Department of Health's 2015 report, *Hawaii Oral Health Key Findings*, showed that if a child's family is beneath the federal poverty level (FPL), they are twice as likely to have had a dental problem in the past six months compared to children in families four times above the FPL. Low-income adults in Hawaii (<\$15,000) are also more likely to have permanent tooth loss compared to high-income adults (>\$75,000)—51 percent vs. 32 percent.

(4) *Oral health care can enable better holistic treatment of patients with chronic conditions.*

According to a 2014 study by the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, treatment of gum disease can lead to better health management—as evidenced by lower healthcare costs and fewer hospitalizations—among people with common health conditions, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Oral health treatments have the potential to improve the overall health of these populations and reduce costs related to their chronic conditions. As we move towards a more integrated health care system, oral health cannot be left behind.

With these important issues in mind, we strongly urge the Hawaii legislature to support funding for Medicaid and QUEST adult dental benefits. If there are any questions, we are always available as a resource.

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Sincerely,

Lawless Barrientos  
Director, Government Relations