

LATE

DentaQuest

DATE: Tuesday, February 23, 2016
TIME: 9:50 a.m.
PLACE: Conference Room 211
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

Re: SB No. 2395, SD 1 An Act Relating to Telehealth

DentaQuest appreciates the opportunity to provide written testimony on Senate Bill No. 2395, SD 1 ("SB 2395 SD 1"), which requires reimbursement parity for telehealth-delivered services in the Medicaid managed care and fee-for-service programs. DentaQuest strongly supports this legislation and its goal to improve access to care for the Medicaid population.

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 SB 2395 SD 1 notes, the use of telehealth can help reduce access to care challenges, particularly in health care provider shortage areas. The use of telehealth allows providers to treat patients in settings that are more convenient and comfortable for the patient. By bringing care to the patient, telehealth helps facilitate a more patient-centered approach to delivering the right services at the right time to improve health outcomes. According to the American Telemedicine Association, early results from a number of telehealth studies show that quality of care is not compromised when services are delivered in non-traditional settings and cost savings can be found for providers, patients, and payers .

While, telehealth legislation has passed in many states, adoption is still low due to a wide variety of regulatory and implementation barriers. For successful telehealth adoption, legislation should address Medicaid reimbursement parity, as private payers will follow public programs. To encourage a variety of potential solutions, legislation should account for different types of telehealth, including, but not limited to, live video and store-and-forward technologies. Rules related to geographic, originating site or provider-type limitations should be reviewed carefully to ensure they support adoption.

Fortunately, SB 2395 SD 1 addresses these barriers to adoption and if passed, would ensure that the Medicaid program optimizes telehealth's potential. DentaQuest is pleased that the legislation acknowledges the value in including a wide range of providers, including dentists, dental technicians, and dental hygienists. Oral health is a critical component of overall health and as delivery and reimbursement models continue to evolve, it is important that telehealth models support improved access to dental services.

Early teledentistry initiatives have already shown tremendous promise. The Pacific Center for Special Care studied the new Virtual Dental Home Demonstration in California to find that systemic costs had declined and 35% of children were less fearful of seeing a dental provider because they were in more comfortable, community settings.

Increasing access to care via telehealth holds the promise of addressing certain oral health access challenges facing Hawaii. Based on 2014 HEDIS measures, Hawaii came in 33rd 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.

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.

By improving the oral health experience for these at-risk populations, telehealth legislation can increase the number of patients receiving preventive services, decrease costs due to inefficiencies, reduce disparities, and improve overall health.

DentaQuest supports SB 2395 SD 1 and encourages its passage. If there are any questions, we are always available as a resource.

Sincerely,

Lawless Barrientos
Director, Government Relations