
A BILL FOR AN ACT

MAKING AN APPROPRIATION TO RESTORE ADULT DENTAL BENEFITS TO
MEDICAID ENROLLEES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that oral disease is a
2 significant health problem among many Hawaii residents,
3 affecting their overall health and well-being. Access to
4 regular oral health care varies greatly across the State, with
5 rural and neighbor island residents and persons with low-income
6 families experiencing greater access issues. Lack of access to
7 dental coverage and oral health care is a social justice issue
8 that disproportionately affects the poor, children, the elderly,
9 and racial and ethnic minority groups.

10 Poor oral health can have serious adverse impacts and is
11 linked to an array of acute and chronic health conditions,
12 including heart disease, diabetes, stroke, depression, low birth
13 weight, and premature birth, among others. Poor oral health can
14 negatively affect employment and the economic strength of the
15 State and impact an individual's health status and self-image.
16 Untreated dental disease can result in a loss of productivity in



1 the work place due to absenteeism, under-employment, and
2 unemployment. Tooth decay is almost completely preventable;
3 however, people who are unable to see a dental provider do not
4 receive the preventive services, early diagnoses, and
5 interventions that can halt or slow the progression of most oral
6 diseases. Problems that could have been addressed early, or
7 even prevented, continue to progress, leading to lower quality
8 of life and poor health outcomes. Dental care coverage is
9 positively associated with access to and utilization of oral
10 health care. Research indicates that children and adults with
11 dental coverage are significantly more likely to seek and use
12 regular dental services than those who are uninsured.

13 Having dental benefits is a key factor in an individual's
14 ability to access dental care. Individuals enrolled in medicaid
15 have an increased likelihood of health disparities. The
16 prevalence of dental disease and tooth loss is
17 disproportionately high among low-income populations.
18 Insufficient coverage or access to care often further
19 disadvantages medicaid recipients, potentially driving worse
20 health outcomes and higher costs. Expanded adult dental
21 benefits can have tremendous positive impacts on state medicaid



1 populations: It has been shown that individuals with dental
2 benefits are forty-two per cent more likely to have a dental
3 checkup within the year than individuals who do not have
4 coverage. Parents who receive dental care are also more likely
5 to take their children to the dentist as well.

6 Nationally, studies have shown that reducing or eliminating
7 medicaid adult dental benefits has led to significant increases
8 in dental-related emergency room visits and associated costs.
9 Ensuring that low-income adults have access to comprehensive
10 dental coverage can improve employability and can lead to better
11 health management.

12 Medicaid provides state and federally-financed health care
13 coverage to certain groups of people with low incomes, including
14 children and their parents, pregnant women, the elderly, and
15 persons with disabilities. Although comprehensive dental
16 coverage is mandatory for children enrolled in medicaid, dental
17 benefits for medicaid-eligible adults are optional. As a
18 result, medicaid adult dental coverage varies tremendously
19 across states. Most states provide only limited or emergency-
20 only coverage; Hawaii is one of thirteen states that cover



1 dental care only for pain relief or emergency care for injuries,
2 trauma, or extractions.

3 According to a 2015 report from the American Dental
4 Association, dental visits to emergency rooms nationwide
5 continue to increase. In 2012, emergency room dental visits
6 cost the United States health care system \$1,600,000,000, at an
7 average cost of \$749 per visit. The report also estimated that
8 up to seventy-nine per cent of emergency room dental visits
9 could be diverted to community settings saving about forty-eight
10 per cent of the cost of each visit. In 2016, there were nearly
11 five thousand emergency room visits related to dental problems
12 in the State, costing more than \$6,600,000, a cost that more
13 than doubled since 2007. Data indicated that medicaid
14 recipients made up more than half of emergency room visits
15 related to dental care. Data also indicated that rural
16 residents of the State, primarily from the north shore of Oahu
17 and the islands of Kauai and Hawaii, were more likely than urban
18 residents to go to the emergency room for dental problems.

19 Adding expanded dental services benefits for the State's
20 adult medicaid enrollees will reduce the number of acute oral
21 health-related emergency room visits and improve these



1 individuals' chronic disease risks and overall health status.
2 Current estimates on costs of restoring expanded benefits to
3 adult medicaid recipients in Hawaii range from \$500 to \$1000 per
4 year per adult, providing a range of preventive and restorative
5 benefits for recipients to help maintain and improve their oral
6 health.

7 It has been nearly a decade since the State removed all but
8 emergency medicaid adult dental benefits. The legislature finds
9 that it is in the best interest of the State and its residents
10 to expand access to care by restoring dental benefits to adult
11 medicaid enrollees. Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to
12 appropriate funds to restore diagnostic, preventive, and
13 restorative dental benefits to adult medicaid enrollees.

14 SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general
15 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$100,000 or so much
16 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2019-2020 and the
17 same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year
18 2020-2021 to restore preventative and restorative adult dental
19 benefits to medicaid enrollees; provided that the department of
20 human services shall obtain the maximum federal matching funds
21 available for this expenditure.



1 The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department
2 of human services for the purposes of this Act.

3 SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2050.



Report Title:

DHS; Medicaid; Adult Dental Benefits; Appropriation

Description:

Makes an appropriation to the Department of Human Services to restore adult dental benefits to medicaid enrollees. Requires federal matching funds. Effective 7/1/2050. (SD1)

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