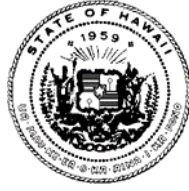


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWÉ KANAKA
Office of the Director
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April 3, 2023

TO: The Honorable Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Chair
Senate Committee on Commerce & Consumer Protection

The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **SCR 188 - URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES MED-QUEST DIVISION TO ADVOCATE THAT THE STATE INCREASE MEDICAID REIMBURSEMENTS TO DENTISTS AND, UPON AN INCREASE APPROVAL, TO PROACTIVELY INFORM BOTH DENTAL SERVICE PROVIDERS AND MEDICAID BENEFICIARIES OF NEW RATE PLANS.**

Hearing: March 24, 2023, 1:02 p.m.
Conference Room 225 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) offers comments.

PURPOSE: This resolution urges that DHS Med-QUEST Division (MQD) advocate that the State increase Medicaid reimbursements to dentists and, upon an increased approval, proactively inform dental service providers and Medicaid beneficiaries of new rate plans and covered services.

The resolution references that the Legislature included a budget allocation of \$25,000,000 to expand dental services for adults. Although the resolution states that it was sufficient for the full restoration of benefits, the 2023 Legislature noted that it was for most but not all dental services. Nevertheless, DHS is grateful for the Legislature's investment in the oral

health of Hawaii's Medicaid members, and MQD successfully launched the expansion three months ago, in January 2023.

Further, information that the expanded dental benefits would be available was sent to every household covered by Medicaid in October 2022 and has been included in the updated Member Handbook, "For Health, For Wellness, For You," mailed to every household in March 2023. Information is also available on the MQD website.

Regarding advocating for an increase in Medicaid reimbursements to dentists, MQD is evaluating reimbursement rates for dental services. It is feasible that MQD could include a budget request to the Governor and Legislature if needed to implement potential increases in reimbursement rates for dental services. Also, if the reimbursement rates for dental services are increased, MQD can inform the Medicaid dental providers via the usual provider communication channels of the updated reimbursement rates. However, per the resolution request, it is not feasible for MQD to inform Medicaid beneficiaries of any rate changes for dental services. MQD has already taken action to inform Medicaid members of the expanded dental benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this resolution.



HAWAI'I ORAL HEALTH COALITION

Date: April 3, 2023

To: The Honorable Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Chair
The Honorable Senator Carol Fukunaga, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection

The Honorable Senator Joy A San Buenaventura, Chair
The Honorable Senator J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services

Re: Support for SCR188 – Medicaid Reimbursement to Dentists

Hrg: April 4, 2023, at 10:14am - Conference Room 229 & via Videoconference

The Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition, a program of the Hawai'i Public Health Institute, is in **strong support of SCR188**, which urges the Department of Human Services' Med-QUEST Division to advocate that the State increase Medicaid reimbursements to dentists and, upon an increase approval, to proactively inform both dental service providers and Medicaid beneficiaries of new rate plans.

The mission of the Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition (HOHC) is to improve the overall health and well-being of all Hawai'i residents by increasing access to and equity in oral health care through collaborative partnerships, advocacy, and education. HOHC is a community-driven organization comprised of members representing organizations and individuals from diverse sectors across Hawai'i. The HOHC operates under the auspice of the Hawai'i Public Health Institute.

Oral health is essential to the overall physical, psychological, social, and economic well-being of Hawai'i's residents. Yet, our residents suffer from poor oral health:

- Hawai'i has among the highest prevalence of dental decay in children and adults compared to other states.
- Low-income families, intellectually and developmentally disabled residents, kūpuna, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander populations, and neighbor island residents are disproportionately impacted by poor oral health.
- Lack of an in-state dental school, geographic isolation, lack of community water fluoridation, and societal inequities are significant contributors to our poor oral health status.

With over 288,000 adults with Medicaid dental benefits, there is a lack of dental providers that accept Medicaid to adequately meet the need for services among the population. Our state's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) cared for approximately 40,000 dental patients in 2021ⁱ, and often have long wait lists due to the limited facility and staffing capacity. Additionally, only 240 FQHC and general practice dentists are active in Medicaid in Hawai'i. However, it is unclear how many currently accept new patients. While the legislature recently allocated funding to reinstate basic services to adults enrolled in Medicaid, the shortage of Medicaid providers and limited infrastructure hinders the provision of services across the state, primarily in rural and neighbor island communities.

While dental providers are frequently encouraged to enroll with Medicaid, there are currently no clear incentives available that promote provider recruitment and retention. We are aware that the existing reimbursement rates are much lower than the actual cost of services, which may hinder the sustainability of practices that accept Medicaid. Currently, SB397 seeks to increase Medicaid reimbursements to eligible health care providers, yet there is no indication that dental care providers are included among this group. As oral health is an integral component of overall health, and ought to be viewed as equally important as any other aspect of health and wellness, we believe it is essential that certain measures to encourage increased dental provider participation in Medicaid are also considered.

The State has already begun to reinvest in the oral health of its most vulnerable residents through the recent approval of funding to reinstate diagnostic, preventive, and restorative coverage for adults with Medicaid. In order to support the success and sustainability of this program, it is imperative that additional efforts are sought to increase Medicaid dental provider availability. SCR188 supports an effective pathway to improve Medicaid dental provider recruitment and retention efforts, and improved access to dental care for individuals with Medicaid.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask you to pass SCR188. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mahalo,



Patrick Donnelly
Statewide Oral Health Coalition Manager
Hawai'i Public Health Institute

ⁱ <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/data-reporting/program-data?grantNum=H80CS06640>

Date: April 4, 2023

Committee: COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Honorable Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Fukunaga, and Committee members

And COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Honorable Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and Committee members

SCR 188 RELATING TO ORAL HEALTH

Testifier: Dr. Don B. Sand DDS

My name is Dr. Don Sand, a former cosmetic dentist from California who has been, for 8 years, working as both a frontline dentist and a consultant to the underserved in Hawaii. I am a leader in 4 oral health organizations, 2 national best practices and 2 local coalitions that have been working to address care disparities in Hawaii. With this experience in clinical care and advocacy I am testifying as an individual dentist.

I stand in strong support of SCR. 188.

The committee and leadership of Health and Human Services have found that:

“...oral health is essential to an individual's overall physical, psychological, social, and economic well-being. Despite the importance of oral health, Hawaii residents generally suffer from poor oral health, and Hawaii has among the highest prevalence in the nation of preventable dental decay in children and adults.

This Senate Resolution finds, “...that preventative dental cleanings and early treatment result in a lower cost to the State's health care system than emergency room treatment; and many of the State's low-income residents delay dental care, ultimately resulting in their turning to emergency rooms, which can only stabilize patients and are unable to do more specialized dentistry procedures that patients often need;

Our Hawaii grassroots oral health care coalitions and private practice hui have found that:

“Thousands of our people in Hawaii are having challenges to get an appointment for dental care Many and seeking help for missing front teeth needed to smile for work, for job interviews or to be able to enjoy essential social and behavioral health needs from feeling basic esteem in their smile. Everyday thousands of adults are suffering the inability to enjoy plate lunch much less have enough back teeth needed to grind food in order to meet their minimal nutritional needs. Finally, because the system is broken everyday our people are suffering pain of oral infections and facial infections due to abscessed teeth or gum that is costing the patient and our state. In a recent 5-year Hawaii study, the conclusion is that oral disease that could have been prevented cost our ER hospital systems \$38.7 million, close to half being Medicaid funds being unnecessarily lost.

The first big successful step in 12 years since the adult dental Medicaid benefit was lost in 2009, is credited to the **2022 Hawaii State Legislative session** who in their wisdom passed a measure to reinstate Adult Dental Medicaid with an attached allocation of matched State and Federal funds totaling \$25.9 million. These funds are currently held at the Department of Human Service, the MedQuest division but can only be used for patient benefits not for capacity expansion.

Unfortunately, this allocation does not address the **need to increase the capacity** of the system. 280,000 patients who became eligible for dental care Jan 1, 2023. Due to the low capacity, these patients will not have an easy chance to get an appointment.

The 3 possible oral health systems that could be invested in to increase the infrastructure and capacity are the Community Health Centers, the private practice dental offices and the alternative dental delivery systems.

One quick example that may illustrate the **huge need** compared to our **existing capacity** can be seen by looking at the rough numbers of patients seen in our 14 safety-net community health centers in 2021. The total estimated **combined patients** seen were just under **40,000**. Please contrast that number 40,000 served to the **280,000 adults** that can now be eligible for Medicaid dental services starting last month Jan 1, 2023. Even if the FQHCs can increase capacity by 10% that would mean only 4,000 new patients can be seen. It may be noteworthy that of those 280,000 now newly eligible it is estimated that 70,000 are Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders.

The second venue for possibly capacity build-out is our private practice dentists and group dental offices. However there must be a multipronged approach to incentivize this sector they have a higher overhead than the public health systems. To date private practice dentist who's overhead has increased dramatically in the last 3 years, must look at the reimbursement rates and ask if those rates even begin to cover their overhead. Private practice dentist do not benefit from grants that the community health centers receive nor do they benefit from the higher Medicaid PPS (prospective payment system) patient encounter reimbursement.

With your support many of the other key elements of our oral health systems can be improved by supporting the bill HB 617. HD1, SD1 that calls to establish an Oral Health Task Force to review information and data relating to the status of oral health in Hawaii, to make a recommendation to ways to improve the infrastructure and to restore the first 2 oral health program specialist positions in the Department of Health until the dental division can be re-established.

Many other states are also stepping up with new adult dental Medicaid programs and are dramatically increasing reimbursements knowing that covering the overhead of the dentist practices is the first of several actions that support a sustainable oral health system. Other state best practices include improving the cumbersome billing systems and making direct financial investments in the delivery systems that badly need more dental chairs, equipment, professional staff and facility expansions.

Nation Oral Health experts with notable careers that have been built on implementing innovated best practice strategies and tactics of health care systems improvement. Especially valuable to Hawaii would be National Experts with years of success developing innovative Medicaid delivery systems. These experts also work in and know the federal and congressional policy systems that can be used to support our State oral health care systems. Instead of having to recreate the wheel, our state can save millions of dollars and save many years by resourcing the professional expertise and experience of a few key National Public health experts advising our legislative committees and our taskforce team.

Mahalo for this valuable opportunity to testify,

Dr. Don Sand DDS

LATE

SCR-188

Submitted on: 4/3/2023 9:13:45 PM
Testimony for HHS on 4/4/2023 10:14:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lea Minton	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I stand in strong support of SCR 188. Our dentists need higher reimbursement so that Medicaid members can receive the services they are in need of. Good oral health is critical to the health of each individual and the health of our community.

mahalo,

Le'a Minton, APRN