

A dental benefit in Medicaid for adults with disabilities will improve health, save the state money, reduce opioid addiction

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

More than 250,000 adult Texans in Medicaid receive little to no dental services. When they have dental pain, their only option is the emergency room, where they are treated with antibiotics and pain-killers. Because the real problem remains unaddressed, emergency rooms are being unnecessarily used, state dollars are being unnecessarily spent, a direct pathway for opioid addiction is growing, and employment opportunities for this critical population are impacted.

SOLUTION

In 2019, SB556 (Kolkhorst)/HB1647 (Deshotel) would instate a dental benefit for this population, not only improving their oral and overall health outcomes, but also making better use of public funds.

Outcomes include:

1. Control costs and save the state money

Access to preventive care will **reduce reliance on expensive hospital emergency rooms and admissions for crisis intervention**. Texas Health Institute showed that **preventive services are far cheaper than a visit to the hospital**. They noted that in FY2016, hospitals charged **\$73 M for adult patients presenting with severe dental pain that identified Medicaid as the payer**. (Emergency Department and Inpatient Hospitalizations for Non-Traumatic Dental Conditions in Texas, 2018).

Average cost of...	
Preventive dental care in dentist office, community setting	\$200
ER visit	\$1,853
Hospital in-patient for dental	\$46,198

Source: Texas Health Institute, Emergency Department and Inpatient Hospitalizations for Non-Traumatic Dental Conditions in Texas, 2018

A dental benefit will also **reduce cost of acute care**. Better oral health leads to better overall health (Institute of Medicine's Advancing Oral Health in America, 2011). Poor oral health can result in increased severity and occurrence of co-occurring conditions, including heart disease, stroke, and high blood pressure. A study comparing the cost of acute care in Medicaid adults found savings of 67% for heart disease, 36% for diabetes, and similar savings in a variety of chronic conditions, when those adults had access to preventive dental care (National Association of Dental Providers Analysis Shows Adults with Medicaid Preventive Dental Benefits Have Lower Medical Costs for Chronic Conditions, 2017).

2. Obstruct the flow of opioids to the community

Access to preventive dental care will **reduce consumers' need for and access to opioid prescriptions**, which can lead to addiction. Most Texas Medicaid programs offer emergency-only dental coverage: consumers can only access care when a problem is so bad, they have to go to the emergency room. In this setting, consumers receive a **medical intervention** of antibiotics and painkillers, often opioids. Nationally, 50.3% of people presenting in ERs for non-traumatic dental pain receive a prescription for opioids (American Journal of Emergency Medicine, January 2018).

"... most dental-related emergency department visits can and should be diverted to dental offices through access to routine dental care."

American Dental Association Health Policy Institute Issue Brief, 2015.