



STATE OF DELAWARE
STATE COUNCIL FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
Margaret M. O'Neill Bldg., Suite 1
Dover, Delaware 19901
302-739-3621

The Honorable John Carney
Governor

John A. McNeal
Director

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 23, 2019

TO: All Members of the Delaware State Senate
and House of Representatives

FROM: Mr. J. Todd ^{4TW/120} Webb, Chairperson
State Council for Persons with Disabilities

RE: S.B. 92 (Medicaid Dental Benefit for Adults)

I am writing you on behalf of the State Council for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) to give our strong endorsement to the position taken by the Delaware Community Legal Aid Society Inc., Disabilities Law Program (DLP) in stalwart support of Senate Bill 92, Dental Care for Adult Medicaid Recipients (DLP letter attached). In addition, SCPD has the following observations.

The State Council for Persons with Disabilities is charged in 29 Del. C. §8210 with the responsibility of proposing and promoting laws, regulations, programs and policies to improve the well-being of persons with disabilities. In addition, SCPD promotes coordination among programs impacting people with disabilities. Council's membership includes state agencies, persons with disabilities, family members, advocacy organizations and providers.

Delaware is one of only three states in the nation that does not offer some form of adult dental benefit through the Medicaid program. It is appalling for Delaware to lag so far behind other states in providing access to such a basic service. Legislation supporting urgent/preventative adult dental healthcare for Medicaid recipients has been a top legislative priority of the SCPD for over 10 years based, in part, on the following rationale:

- 49% of adult Delawareans with disabilities have lost teeth because of decay, infection or gum disease¹

¹ Source: Lee, J.C., & McDuffie, M.J. (2017). *Oral Health for People with Disabilities in Delaware: Survey of Dentists in Delaware*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware, Center for Disabilities Studies

- 48% of adult Delawareans with disabilities that have delayed getting dental care state that the reason that they did so was because they could not afford dental care²;
- A disproportionate number of adult individuals with significant disabilities who are living in the community rely on Medicaid for healthcare;
- *The Plan to Achieve Health Equity for Persons with Disabilities*³, collaboration between the University of Delaware, Center for Disabilities Studies and The Department of Health and Social Services identified dental care for adults with disabilities as a top priority. One of the goals in the plan was to amend the language within state policies related to medical and dental insurance that present barriers to health equity by June 2018.
- Dental/Oral healthcare is fundamental to overall health and well-being.
- To further resolve the issue of institutional bias by providing preventative dental care to adults who are Medicaid eligible;
 - Current Federal requirements specify that each nursing facility “must provide emergency dental services.”⁴

We believe that furnishing dental care for adult Medicaid recipients will provide a long-term Medicaid savings with this relatively small investment. More importantly, it provides an essential step to ensuring equality of health and well-being over a lifetime for Medicaid recipients with disabilities living in the community. The State Council for Persons with Disabilities strongly endorses the passage of SB 92 as it aligns squarely with core priorities and will greatly expand this important benefit to many constituencies.

Thank you for your consideration and please contact SCPD if you have any questions regarding our position or observations on the proposed legislation.

cc:

Lt. Governor Bethany Hall Long
 Mr. Stephen Groff, Medicaid Director
 Ms. Laura Waterland, Esq., Disabilities Law Program
 Governor’s Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens
 Developmental Disabilities Council

P&L/SB 92 medicaid dental benefit for adults 5-28-19

² Source: Lee, J.C., & McDuffie, M.J. (2017). *Oral Health for People with Disabilities in Delaware: Survey of Dentists in Delaware*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware, Center for Disabilities Studies

³ <http://www.cds.udel.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/healthequityplan0215.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/ltss/institutional/nursing/index.html>



DISABILITIES LAW PROGRAM

COMMUNITY LEGAL AID SOCIETY, INC.

100 W. 10th Street, Suite 801
Wilmington, Delaware 19801
(302) 575-0660 TTY (302) 575-0696 Fax (302) 575-0840
www.declasi.org

5/14/2019

By Email

The Honorable Bryan Townsend, Chair
Delaware Senate Health and Social Service Committee
411 Legislative Ave
Dover DE 19901

Re: Senate Bill 92, Dental Care for Adult Medicaid Recipients

Dear Senator Townsend:

I am writing on behalf of Community Legal Aid Society, including the Disabilities Law Program and the Elder Law Program, to express strong support for Senate Bill 92. As you recognize in the Synopsis for the bill, Delaware is one of only three states in the nation that does not offer some form of adult dental benefit through the Medicaid program. It is unusual for Delaware to lag so far behind other states in providing access to such a basic service.

Access to dental care and the maintenance of oral health is a critical public health issue and has significant benefits that far outweigh its modest cost. Providing access to dental care is wholly consistent with Delaware's initiatives focusing on positive health outcomes and addressing the social determinants of health. Socio-economic status directly impacts oral health.

According to the American Dental Association Health Policy Institute, one in five low income adults indicate that their teeth are in poor condition. Of this same group, 37% report that they avoid smiling, and 35% indicate embarrassment due to the condition of their teeth. Sixty percent indicate that cost is the primary reason they have not sought out dental care.¹ Consider that poor oral health has psychological costs that can impact not only state of mind but employability.

The mouth is considered the gateway to the body and is an important tool in diagnosing numerous conditions, including diabetes, some cancers, heart disease, HIV/AIDS and kidney disease. Besides causing pain and difficulty eating, poor oral health can lead to heart problems and other organ disease. Studies have shown associations between poor oral health and a number of chronic conditions especially prevalent in low income groups.² Oral disease and pain associated with poor oral health leads to expensive emergency room visits. Poor oral health can lead to

¹ <https://www.ada.org/-/media/ADA/Science%20and%20Research/HPI/OralHealthWell-Being-StateFacts/US-Oral-Health-Well-Being.pdf?la=en>

² <https://www.asaging.org/blog/mouth%E2%88%92body-connection>

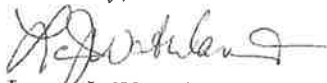
pre-term birth, low birth weight and pre-eclampsia. In the elderly, tooth loss leads to poor diet. The soft foods that those with tooth loss must eat further aggravate decay and disease³

Access to oral health care will benefit every demographic group that CLASI serves; however, two populations deserve special mention. First, the elderly are particularly vulnerable to poor oral health brought on by years of not having access to proper dental care.⁴ The lack of care leads not only to missed opportunities to diagnose and treat serious conditions but also directly impacts quality of life, including diet. Poor diet exacerbates underlying conditions and leads to poor outcomes. Again, poor oral health can lead to depression, anxiety and social isolation.

Second, access to appropriate dental care for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities is especially important. There are known disparities in the quality of oral health between individuals with I/DD and typically developing individuals.⁵ Dental needs for adults with I/DD are complex and are largely very poorly met by existing mechanisms.⁶

Access to dental care can only lead to better outcomes for a large cross section of Delaware citizens. Providing oral care through the adult lifespan will improve overall physical and mental health and further the goals of DHSS. We strongly endorse and recommend passage of SB 92.

Sincerely,



Laura J. Waterland, Esq.

Project Director

Disabilities Law Program. CLASI

Letter endorsed by:

Ability Network of Delaware, C. Thomas Cook, S.Psy.S
Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council
State Council for Persons with Disabilities, Todd Webb Chair
EPIC

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https://familiesusa.org/sites/default/files/product_documents/MCD_Cutting-Medicaid-Funding-Updated_factsheet.pdf

4 https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/basics/adult-oral-health/adult_older.htm

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<https://www.aegisdentalnetwork.com/cced/2017/11/oral-healthcare-for-persons-with-intellectual-or-developmental-disabilities-why-is-there-a-disparity>

6 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3317070/>;

<https://www.disabilitycoop.com/2019/05/08/despite-need-dental-elusive/26584/>