



The Honorable Ralph Northam
Governor of Virginia

August 12, 2019

Daniel Carey, MD
Secretary of Health and Human Resources

P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam and Secretary Carey,

With the historic expansion of Medicaid eligibility in Virginia last year, hundreds of thousands of additional Virginia residents are now enrolled in Medicaid health care services. Your leadership and unwavering commitment to the health of underserved Virginians is having a lasting impact on the lives of many.

We write with the belief that true, comprehensive health coverage for Virginians is now within reach. The undersigned organizations know first-hand that oral health is a vital piece of health care. Coverage for dental services in Medicaid will enable Virginians to improve their chronic disease outcomes, be better able to enter and succeed in the workforce, and prevent costly and painful dental disease. To that end, we ask you to further improve access to critical health services by including a comprehensive dental benefit for all adults enrolled in Medicaid as part of your proposed amendments to the 2020-2022 budget.

Currently, Medicaid dental only covers pregnant women and emergency extractions for adults.

On May 21st, Dr. Jennifer Lee, director of Virginia's Medicaid program, presented to the Senate Finance Committee and stated that **dental is one of the biggest unmet needs in the Commonwealth**. Adding a comprehensive adult dental benefit that includes preventive and restorative services will **improve the health of over nearly one million Virginia adults** who are currently enrolled in Medicaid. This will save the Commonwealth money by improving chronic disease management and reducing inappropriate emergency department visits. Additionally, a benefit will support the Commonwealth's dental safety net clinics by providing an additional revenue source.

Virginia Medicaid currently covers one-third of all Virginia adults with disabilities and three-fifths of all nursing home residents; both population groups have high rates of chronic disease and poor access to dental care.¹ **54% of older adults cited dental care as their most frequent unmet need**, second only to transportation.²

A dental benefit will improve chronic disease outcomes and save the Commonwealth money.

- Poor oral health, specifically gum disease, is associated with diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. When a person with diabetes treats their gum disease, their annual **medical costs are lowered by \$2,840, and they reduce their hospital admissions by 39.4%.**³

A dental benefit will decrease the use of the emergency department for dental issues.

¹ Virginia Medicaid fact sheet. Kaiser Family Foundation. 2018. <http://files.kff.org/attachment/fact-sheet-medicaid-state-va>. Accessed June 20, 2019.

² Medicaid oral health coverage for older adults and people with disabilities. National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities. 2016. <http://www.nasvad.org/sites/nasvad/files/dentaquest%2010.pdf>. Accessed June 20, 2019.

³ Jeffcoat MK, Jeffcoat RL, Gladkowski PA, Bramson JB, Blum JJ. Impact of periodontal therapy on general health: Evidence from insurance data for five systemic conditions. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2014;47(2): 166-174. doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2014.04.001.

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- Because Medicaid-enrolled adults do not have adequate dental coverage, they often visit the emergency department (ED) for issues related to dental disease. EDs do not provide any dental services, and patients can only receive prescriptions to address infection and pain. In 2016, **Virginia Medicaid spent \$3.3 million dollars on avoidable ED visits for dental issues.**⁴

A dental benefit will improve treatment outcomes in patients with high-severity and chronic substance use disorders.

- Individuals receiving integrated comprehensive oral health care, along with treatment for substance use disorders, are **twice as likely to be employed on discharge and twice as likely to abstain from drug use** compared to those who did not receive comprehensive dental treatment.⁵

We hope you agree that a Medicaid adult dental benefit with preventive and restorative services is a necessary next step to ensure the underserved in Virginia have access to comprehensive health care.

Sincerely, The Virginia Oral Health Coalition and our partners:

Medical Society of Virginia
Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics
Virginia Community Healthcare Association

Virginia Dental Association
Virginia Dental Hygienists' Association

Arlington Free Clinic
America Dental Hygiene Association
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Beach Health Clinic
Blue Ridge Medical Center
Benevis
Capital Area Health Network
Carilion Clinic Dental Care
Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia
Central Virginia Health Svcs
Child Health Investment Partnership (CHIP) of Roanoke Valley
CHIP of SHR
Community Memorial Hospital
Culpeper Winter Heat Shelter
Daily Planet Health Services
Dental Aid NRW
Families Forward Virginia
Family Lifeline
Fauquier Free Clinic
Fellowship Square
Gloucester Women's Clinic
GPW Health Center
Harrisonburg Community Health Center
Health Brigade
Healthy Living and Learning Center @ Petersburg Public Library
Heart of Virginia Free Clinic, Farmville, Virginia
Highland Medical Center
Horizon Health Services, Inc.
Housing Families First
Inova Partnership for Healthier Kids
Institute for Public Health Innovation
Jon C Burr Foundation
Kingdom Educational Solutions, LLC
Mary's Center
Medical Care for Children Partnership Foundation
Mel Leaman Free Clinic

MHC Coalition for Health and Wellness
New Horizons Healthcare
Northern Neck- Middlesex Free Health Clinic
Northern Virginia Aging Network
Northern Virginia Family Service
Northern Virginia Health Foundation
Piedmont Regional Dental Clinic
Reynolds Community College
Rockbridge Area Health Center
School of Dentistry, Virginia Commonwealth University
Sinclair Health Clinic
Smart Beginnings Greater Richmond
Smile Virginia
Southern Dominion Health System
Southwest Virginia Community Health Systems
The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis
The CornerStone Free Health Clinic
The Fenwick Foundation
Tri-Area Community Health Centers
United Way of Roanoke Valley
United Way of South Hampton Roads
VCU Center on Health Disparities
Virginia Board for People with Disabilities
Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations
Virginia Dental Association Foundation
Virginia Head Start Association
Virginia Health Care Association Virginia Center for Assisted Living
Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy
Virginia Poverty Law Center
Virginia Public Health Association
Virginia Rural Health Association
Voices for Virginia's Children
Whitmore Assoc.
West End Orthodontics
YWCA Richmond

⁴ Overview of the Virginia all payer claims database. *Virginia Health Information*. 2016. <https://www.vhi.org/apcd/APCD%20Overview.pdf>. Accessed June 20, 2019.

⁵ McGinn-Shapiro M. Medicaid Coverage of Adult Dental Services. *The National Academy for State Health Policy*. 2008. <https://nashp.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/default/files/Adult%20Dental%20Monitor.pdf>. Accessed June 20, 2019.