



September 10, 2018

The Honorable Ralph Northam  
Governor of Virginia

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 earlier this year, hundreds of thousands of Virginia residents will have access to affordable health care services. Your leadership and unwavering commitment to the health of underserved Virginians will have 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 2018-2020 budget.

Currently, Medicaid only covers emergency extractions for adults.

Adding an adult dental benefit that includes preventive and restorative services will **improve the health of over 700,000 Virginia adults** who will be eligible or enrolled in Medicaid after expansion. 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 (a number that will rise with expansion); both population groups have high rates of chronic disease and poor access to dental care.<sup>1</sup> **54% of older adults cited dental care as their most frequent unmet need**, second only to transportation.<sup>2</sup>

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%.**<sup>3</sup>

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

- 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.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Medicaid Fact Sheet, 2017; Kaiser Family Foundation

<sup>2</sup> National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities, Oral Health Report, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> 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. Am J Prev Med 2014;47(2): 166-174.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia All Payers Claims Database, 2016.



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A dental benefit will reduce reliance on opioid prescriptions for untreated dental disease.

- 56% of Medicaid enrollees who visited the ED for dental issues filled an opioid prescription within 30 days. In Southwest Virginia, **66% of Medicaid-enrolled adults who visited the ED for dental issues filled an opioid prescription;**<sup>5</sup>

A dental benefit will support the pending Medicaid work requirements.

- 35% of low-income adults report the appearance of their mouth and teeth affects **ability to interview for a job.**<sup>6</sup>

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:

Alexandria Commission on Aging  
 Alexandria Public Health Advisory Commission  
 American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
 Arlington Free Clinic  
 Benevis  
 Brighthope  
 Carilion Franklin Memorial Hospital  
 Catholic Charities of Eastern Virginia  
 Central Virginia Health Services  
 Charlottesville Free Clinic  
 CHIP of Roanoke Valley  
 Community Health Center of the New River Valley  
 Community Memorial Hospital  
 Dabney Orthodontics  
 Daily Planet Health Services  
 Dental Aid NRV  
 Disability Law Center of Virginia  
 Early Impact Virginia  
 Eastern Shore Rural Health System, Inc  
 Families Forward Virginia  
 Family Lifeline  
 Fauquier Free Clinic  
 Fellowship Square  
 Greater Prince William Community Health Center  
 Hampton Roads Community Health Center  
 Healthy Living and Learning Center at Petersburg  
 Public Library  
 Highland Medical Center, Inc  
 HOPE - Healing of People Everywhere  
 Housing Families First  
 Hunters Woods Fellowship House  
 Institute for Public Health Innovation  
 Jefferson Area CHIP  
 Johnson Health Center  
 Jon C Burr Foundation  
 Larell One Step Dentures  
 Les Gemmes, Inc. Northern Virginia Chapter  
 Medical Society of Virginia  
 National Association of Community Health Centers  
 New Horizons Healthcare  
 Northern Neck Middlesex Free Health Clinic  
 Northern Virginia Aging Network

Northern Virginia Dental Clinic Inc.  
 Pediatric Dentistry of Burke  
 Piedmont Regional Dental Clinic  
 Public Health Advisory Commission for Alexandria Virginia  
 Rockbridge Area Health Center  
 Senior Services of Southeastern Virginia  
 Smart Beginnings Virginia Peninsula  
 Smiles to You, PLLC  
 Southeastern Virginia Health System  
 The Fenwick Foundation  
 The Old Dominion Dental Society  
 The Virginia Nurses Association  
 Tidewater Dental Hygienists' Association  
 United Way of Roanoke Valley  
 VCU iCubed Oral Health Core  
 VCU School of Dentistry  
 Virginia Association of Community Service Boards  
 Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics  
 Virginia Board for People with Disabilities  
 Virginia Center for Assisted Living  
 Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations  
 Virginia Commonwealth University School of Dental Medicine  
 Virginia Community Healthcare Association  
 Virginia Dental Association  
 Virginia Dental Association Foundation  
 Virginia Dental Hygienists' Association  
 Virginia Education Association  
 Virginia Health Care Association  
 Virginia Network of Private Providers, Inc  
 Virginia Poverty Law Center  
 Virginia Public Health Association  
 Virginia Rural Health Association  
 Voices for Virginia's Children  
 YWCA Richmond

<sup>5</sup> Ibid  
<sup>6</sup> ADA HPI oral health and well being in Virginia 2016