



Improve Health and Save Costs for Older & Disabled Adults

An Adult Dental Benefit in Medicaid

Medicaid does not provide a comprehensive dental benefit for adults; providing access to dental services for older and disabled adults currently enrolled Medicaid will help the Commonwealth realize cost savings related to reduced emergency department (ED) use and chronic disease management, and improve their quality of life.

Improve the Health of Disabled and Older Virginians

- 54% of older adults cited dental care as their most frequent unmet need, second only to transportation. Medicare does not provide any dental coverage.
- 26% of older adults making less than \$25,000 per year report complete tooth loss; only 5% of older adults with incomes over \$50,000 per year report complete tooth loss.
- Nearly two out of five low-income seniors report they “very often” struggle with biting and chewing due to poor oral health, which can compound nutritional problems.
- One study showed more than 80% of individuals with developmental disabilities (IDD) had gum disease and more than 30% had untreated dental disease.

Reduce Avoidable Emergency Department Visits

- Virginia Medicaid spent \$3.31 million on 12,617 visits to the emergency department (ED) for dental related issues (no treatment is provided in the ED).
- One urban hospital in Virginia reports \$1.4 million in charges for 889 ED visits.

Improve Chronic Disease Outcomes and Save Money

- Virginia Medicaid currently covers one-third of all adult Virginians 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.
- With dental treatment, diabetics had an average reduction of 39% in annual hospital admissions, an annual average of 13% fewer physician visits and a \$2,840 reduction in annual medical costs; similar cost savings are shown for individuals with heart disease and stroke.
- A recent study showed one Virginia skilled nursing center saved \$1.93 million dollars in 13 months through tooth brushing, which prevented costly and dangerous pneumonia.

For more information, please contact Sarah Bedard Holland, Executive Director, at 804.269.8721 or sholland@vaoralhealth.org.