



# An Adult Dental Benefit in Medicaid will Save Money and Improve Health

Medicaid does not currently include a comprehensive dental care for adults; providing this benefit will help the Commonwealth realize cost savings related to reduced emergency department (ED) use, chronic disease management, and a reduction in opioid prescribing.

## Reduce Avoidable Emergency Department Visits

- Virginia spent \$3.31 million on 12,617 visits to the ED for dental related pain and infection - no treatment is provided in the ED; if these adults had a dental benefit they could seek care and treatment in an appropriate dental setting.
- One urban hospital in Virginia spent \$1.4 million on 889 ED visits; no treatment was provided, only assistance with pain management and infection.

## Improve Chronic Disease Outcomes and Save Money

- People with gum disease have an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes and having a stroke
- Dental treatment improves chronic disease outcomes and saves money; when a diabetic's dental disease is treated they visit the hospital 39% less, visit the doctor 13% less and save \$2,840 in annual medical costs compared to diabetics with dental disease.
- 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.

## Reduce Opioid Prescribing in the Emergency Department

- 56% of the Medicaid beneficiaries who visited the ED for dental issues filled an opioid prescription within 30 days at a cost to Medicaid of \$121,269.
- Southwest Virginia reports the highest percentage of opioid prescriptions filled (66%) after an ED visit.

## Improve Overall Oral Health

- Over 50% of Virginians without dental coverage put off seeing a dentist because of cost.
- 54% of older adults cited dental care as their second-most frequent unmet need.

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