

March 4, 2019

Members of the House Finance HSS Subcommittee

The Alaska Dental Society (ADS) encourages members of the House Finance HSS subcommittee to maintain current levels of funding for Medicaid programs including the different components that make up Medicaid dental funding.

Medicaid dental funding is made up of 4 separate components. Three are within the overall program funding for Medicaid: under 21 year old Medicaid, Denali Kid care which covers children above the Medicaid income eligibility and below 200% of the poverty line and adult emergent care which covers dental emergency care for adults. A fourth component is a separate line item in the Medicaid budget – Adult Preventative – and covers additional dental care for adults including cleanings, fillings and dentures.

Elimination of funding for the basic levels of care for children would put them at a severe disadvantage to their peers in school. In addition to the hazing from a poor dental appearance, one of the major causes of missed school days for low income children is time lost to poor dental health. Dental issues that can be dealt with easily in the early stages take on major importance as cavities deepen and cause infections. The school time lost for a population already at risk compounds the socioeconomic problems leading to additional costs for the state.

Adult Preventative serves a valuable function by preventing greater – and more expensive – dental problems, restoring dignity and appearance to Medicaid recipients and helping them to transition away from public assistance. Without the safety net of adult Medicaid the inevitable result will be more frequent emergency room visits. ER's, in addition to being far more costly than dental office visits, can only provide temporary care with pain killers and antibiotics. In contrast to medical infection, dental infections are only temporarily stopped with antibiotics and will return in weeks or months. In recent years the medical and dental communities, with some prodding from the legislature, have made strides in reducing the number of opioids prescribed to an at risk population. Forcing care to be delivered in ERs will turn the clock back on this progress.

Adult preventative allows adult Medicaid recipients to improve their appearance helping them transition from public assistance. Saving salvageable teeth where practical or transitioning Medicaid recipients to dentures when necessary improves their appearance and makes them more marketable especially in the service industry.

The ADS encourages the House Finance HSS committee to recommend continuing funding levels for the Medicaid program and for Adult preventative at FY2019 levels in the FY2020 budget.

Sincerely,

David Logan, DDS

David Logan, DDS
Executive Director, Alaska Dental Society