



## **Alaska Dental Society**

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# **SB199/HB265 Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage**

The Alaska Dental Society urges passage of SB199/HB265.

SB199 and its companion bill HB265 remedy an unintended consequence of the adult dental supplemental Medicaid coverage. Currently, under the maximum allowable benefit, a Medicaid recipient may receive either an upper or lower denture.

Unfortunately many Medicaid recipients need dentures for both the upper and lower jaws or dental arches. SB199/HB265 would allow a Medicaid recipient to combine two years worth of coverage so they could receive a full denture of both upper and lower dentures at the same time.

SB199/HB265 provides a benefit for everyone involved – the patient, the doctor and the Medicaid program:

- Medicaid recipients benefit from receiving both dentures at once, restoring their appearance, their ability to talk and chew, and most importantly their dignity.
- Providers benefit as they are no longer placed in the uncomfortable position of deciding which arch is in the worst condition. They can also work in a more efficient fashion constructing both sets of dentures simultaneously.
- The state benefits economically. The cost for both dentures, which would normally be borne over 2 years are now in one year but Medicaid recipients would still be limited to the same benefit total for 2 years. Denture patients frequently have to use travel benefits to reach a provider and for dentures this can be especially costly as dentures require multiple appointments. Providing both dentures at the same time would reduce the states travel expenses in half. Removing diseased and abscessed teeth would also save on costly ER and oral surgery visits.

# J U N E A U D E N T A L

November 10, 2009

Senator Ellis  
716 W. 4th Ave. Suite 500  
Anchorage AK, 99501-2133

Dear Senator Ellis:

Thank you for sponsoring a bill to allow Medicaid recipients to use two consecutive years of supplemental benefits in the same year to receive upper and lower dentures at the same time. This will greatly help recipients as a single denture when you have no teeth to oppose it is of limited value. I believe it will ultimately lower costs for the Medicaid division, also, when travel benefits are factored in for this multi step procedure that must be repeated twice under the current system.

A case I did earlier this year may illustrate the problem providers' face. Due to HIPAA concerns I am not using names for this story.

I have a dental office in Juneau. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, dental offices in other Southeast communities do not usually accept new Medicaid patients. This patient had to travel over from Sitka and needed dentures, both upper and lower. He currently did not have either upper and lowers having lost both sets. The supplemental system for adult Medicaid benefits would cover a single denture, either the upper or lower. The patient, 78 years old and on fixed income, was unable to afford the second set even at reduced Medicaid fees. I wrote a letter Medicaid division, enclosed, outlining the problem and pointing out that travel costs associated with constructing the second set at a later date (when the new year's benefits kicked in) would ultimately cost more than the Medicaid fee for a denture. I received a reply from the division basically saying their hands were tied given the current statutes in place.

In the case of this patient I did a full set of dentures for the patient and absorbed the cost of construction of the second set. As I write this letter I saw two patients today in the same situation, one who lives here in Juneau that we are constructing an upper denture alone although he has no lower teeth. Currently are plan is construct the lowers after July

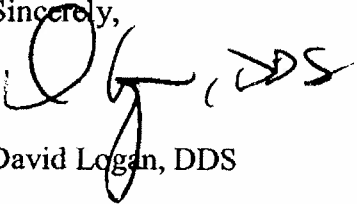
2237 N. Jordan Avenue, Juneau, AK 99801

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1, 2010. The second patient traveled here from Angoon and lost both his upper and lower dentures 2 weeks ago. His treatment will be further complicated as his old set was apparently ill fitting and led to a large tissue mass on the lower that will have to be removed prior to denture construction.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "DLG, DDS". The signature is stylized with a large "D" and "L" and a trailing "G" followed by "DDS".

David Logan, DDS

2237 N. Jordan Avenue, Juneau, AK 99801

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L O G A N  
D E N T A L

December 17, 2008

ACS  
Preauthorizations  
POB 240808  
Anchorage, AK 99524-0808

Re: [REDACTED]  
Medicaid #: [REDACTED]

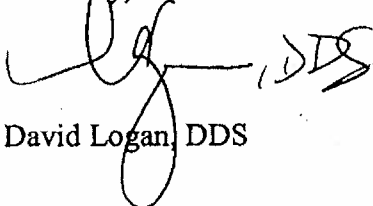
Dear Sirs:

Mr. [REDACTED] is currently edentulous (without teeth) upper and lower. We have previously preauthorized Mr. [REDACTED] for a lower denture (preauth [REDACTED]) – working with a Sitka Clinic we had not previously seen Mr. [REDACTED].

Mr. [REDACTED] has been without teeth for 6 years. One denture, the maximum allowed under the MEDS system, will provide little improvement for him. Mr. [REDACTED] will be traveling to our office from Sitka for completion of the denture. The travel costs will ultimately cost more than the fee for the denture given the number of appointments required to properly construct a denture.

I am requesting preauthorization for upper and lower dentures (included) for Mr. [REDACTED]. This is a case where everyone will benefit: the state will have less overall costs than a second round of travel costs to construct the other denture after July 1, Mr. [REDACTED] will have opposing dentures to eat with, and my overall costs will be less than repeating the same appointments come July 1.

Sincerely,

  
David Logan, DDS

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The Honorable Senator Ellis  
Alaska State Senate  
State Capitol, Room 103  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Re: Support for Medicaid Coverage for Dentures – SB 199

January 22, 2010

Dear Senator Ellis,

The Alaska Primary Care Association (APCA) represents 26 health care organizations and 142 non-profit Community Health Centers (CHCs), as well as other safety net providers throughout Alaska. In 2009, our sites provided primary healthcare to over 81,000 Alaskans from across the state. According to the Alaska Community Health Center Uniform Data System, Alaska's CHC provided dental services to 16,244 Alaskans and totaled 39,016 dental encounters in 2007.

The APCA supports providing a two-year funding cycle for Medicaid assistance coverage for dentures. The APCA knows that access to dental services improves health outcomes and reduces overall health care costs. Oral health is critical for overall health and adults in the Medicaid program receiving access to dental services reduces the likeliness that they will develop more expensive and acute dental problems.

We appreciate your hard work and service to Alaskans and support your efforts to expand access to health care for all Alaskans.

Respectfully,

Regan Mattingly  
State Affairs Coordinator

Shelley S. Hughes  
Government Affairs Director



November 6, 2009

Senator Johnny Ellis  
Senate Majority Leader  
Alaska State Legislature  
716 W. 4th Ave  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
Fax: (907) 269-017

Dear Senator Ellis;

I am writing on behalf of the Alaska Public Health Association (ALPHA) to extend our support for and thank you for introducing a Bill that will allow Alaska's adult Medicaid recipients to receive a set of dentures within one fiscal year. This Act will meet the needs of patients and dental providers by providing two-years worth of dental benefits for dentures in a single year.

The ALPHA represents over 150 health professionals in Alaska; the primary mission of ALPHA is the enhancement of the public's health. In fulfilling our mission, we support systems that support patient-oriented health service delivery. ALPHA believes that the "Act providing for a two-year funding cycle for medical assistance coverage for dentures" establishes a system enabling patients to receive patient-oriented care.

Thank you for consulting ALPHA in developing this Bill. Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Fink".

Karol Fink, MS, RD  
ALPHA Health Policy Chair  
[Karolfink@yahoo.com](mailto:Karolfink@yahoo.com)  
907.227.8178

# STATE OF ALASKA

## DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

### *Alaska Commission on Aging*

SEAN PARNELL, GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 110693  
JUNEAU, ALASKA 99811-0693  
PHONE: (907) 465-3250  
FAX: (907) 465-1398

January 23, 2010

Senator Johnny Ellis  
Senate Health and Social Services Committee  
Alaska State Capitol, Room 103  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

**Subject: Support Letter for SB 199**

Dear Senator Ellis:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) is pleased to offer support for SB 199, a bill to provide access to Medicaid patients who are approved for dentures using a two-year funding cycle for medical assistance benefits to cover the costs for complete and partial dentures in a single fiscal year. This legislation is authored by you and co-sponsored by Senators Bettye Davis, Dennis Egan, Hollis French, Linda Menard, Donald Olson, Joe Paskvan, Joe Thomas, and Bill Wielechowski.

The Commission believes SB 199 provides a common sense solution that allows patients and their dentists the flexibility to schedule treatment around the oral health needs of the patient, which will improve the quality of care for older Alaskans and other qualifying recipients. Moreover, this legislation enhances the cost-effectiveness of the current Medicaid Adult Dental program by reducing the number of oral surgery visits, medical procedures, and related travel costs required for individuals who need a complete set of dentures but are limited to half of a set of dentures per fiscal year under the existing program. Anecdotally, we have learned that some individuals may even refuse partial extractions in one arch knowing that they could be without teeth for a prolonged period waiting for Medicaid to cover the cost of the other complete denture in the next fiscal year.

Good nutrition is vital for health and wellness across the life span and depends on oral health. Dental pain and missing or decaying teeth can affect dietary choices for seniors that may impact overall health and wellness. Vulnerable older Alaskans are at risk of developing dental infections that have been associated with periodontal disease, diabetes, pneumonia, and other chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease. Restorative dental care can help to prevent the progression of serious dental disease and discomfort which can result in more costly emergency care.

Older Alaskans utilize the Medicaid Adult Dental program. According to data based on Medicaid claims information for persons age 60 years and older for the period April 1, 2007 thru December 31, 2009, there were a total of 3,104 (unduplicated) seniors served by the Medicaid Adult Dental Program. The average cost for partial dentures for seniors ranges between \$1,085 (for a complete maxillary denture) to \$1,125 (for a complete mandibular denture). The approximate cost for a complete set of dentures is \$2,225. The current program cap is \$1,150 per year.

As we move forward, the Commission respectfully asks for your consideration of our recommendations below to enhance SB 199 and the Adult Dental Medicaid program for qualifying older Alaskans and other Medicaid recipients:

- Allow eligible patients access to two years of total funding as determined by the cost cap of the Medicaid Adult Dental program to permit individuals receiving partial dentures through the program the ability to access remaining benefits under the cost cap should they need additional denture services during the two-year period.
- Pending approval of SB 199, begin work with the Department of Health and Social Services to expand the two-year access of services to phase in other preventative and restorative services allowed under the Medicaid Adult Dental program in FY 2012.
- Adjust the annual cost cap for dental services (currently in statute for the last three years) to address the rising costs of dental care and encourage more participation of Medicaid dental providers.

Please accept our sincere appreciation for your efforts to improve the Medicaid Adult Dental program by allowing patients who qualify for dentures under the program to receive their full set of dentures according to a treatment schedule determined by the patient with their dentist. We believe that SB 199 will help to improve health and wellness for many older Alaskans who need dentures and we support passage of this legislation. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director, by phone (465-4879) or email ([denise.daniello@alaska.gov](mailto:denise.daniello@alaska.gov)) should you have questions or require additional information. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Sharon Howerton-Clark  
Chair, Alaska Commission on Aging

Sincerely,



Denise Daniello  
ACoA Executive Director

Cc: Senator Bettye Davis  
Senator Dennis Egan  
Senator Hollis French  
Senator Linda Menard

Senator Donald Olson  
Senator Joe Paskvan  
Senator Joe Thomas  
Senator Bill Wielechowski



## **Adjust Cap on Adult Dental Services Reimbursed by Medicaid**

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education, Alaska Mental Health Board, Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, and Alaska Commission on Aging, in collaboration with the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and the Alaska Brain Injury Network, jointly support the developing a solution that will allow for the adjustment of the current cap on adult dental services reimbursed by Medicaid.

- Currently, the annual cap for dental services – such as cleanings, exams, crowns, root canals and dentures – is \$1,150 per individual. With the rising cost of dental care, this cap is proving not adequate yet the cap is set in statute and has not been increased in over three years.
- The American Dental Association recommends adult preventive and restorative dental services be included in all state Medicaid programs, and as former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop stated, "You're not healthy without good oral health."
- Trust beneficiaries continue to list dental services as a priority unmet health needs.
- The challenge this session is to find a current bill or to introduce a new bill that will create a method for adjusting the adult dental Medicaid cap on a regular basis or will at least increase the cap to cover the increase the cost of living increases over a 4 or five year period.

**Therefore, we support a legislative solution that will allow for the adjustment of the current cap on adult dental services reimbursed by Medicaid.**



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November 19, 2009

Honorable Johnny Ellis  
Majority Leader  
Alaska Senate  
716 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Anchorage, AK 99501

Dear Majority Leader Ellis:

On behalf of the 97,000 members of AARP in Alaska, we would like to pledge our support for your bill to establish a two year funding cycle for the adult dental benefit in Medicaid.

We understand you are particularly interested in changing the benefit for dentures so that an adult Medicaid beneficiary would be able to use the funds available for two years to pay for dentures. This makes sense for both the client and the provider.

Older persons in need of dentures often have accompanying nutrition problems. These nutrition problems can cause other health issues and create an overall deterioration in health status. For those who need them, dentures are essential to quality health care. Two-year funding for dentures should be considered sensible prevention with the long term possibility of saving Medicaid funds that would not need to be spent of more serious health care problems resulting from poor oral health status.

Should you have any questions about our position, please feel free to contact me (586-3637) or Patrick Luby, AARP Advocacy Director (907-762-3314).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marie Darlin, Coordinator  
AARP Capital City Task Force  
415 Willoughby Avenue, Apt. 506  
Juneau, AK 99801  
586-3637 (voice)  
463-3580 (fax)