



Maryland
Hospital Association

Senate Bill 220: Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Coverage of Dental Services

Position: *Support*

Bill Summary

SB 220 would repeal the provision of law that made the effectiveness of a certain provision of law authorizing the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide dental services to certain adults contingent on the Maryland Dental Action Coalition making a certain determination.

MHA Position

Maryland's hospitals support the expansion of coverage for dental services for adults. Providing access to this service not only benefits patients but also helps mitigate lengthy wait times in hospital emergency departments.

A recent report from the Maryland Dental Access Coalition highlights how a lack of dental coverage for adults adversely impacts Maryland's emergency departments. Among the findings:

- From fiscal 2013 to fiscal 2016, there were an average of more than 49,000 emergency department visits for chronic dental conditions
- Over the same time period, the average annual cost to provide these services for Medicaid enrollees was nearly \$11.5 million
- The lack of dental coverage disproportionately affects Medicaid, as the rate of visits for Medicaid enrollees is more than three times greater than the total adult population

This problem adds to wait times in Maryland's emergency departments, which are among the longest wait times in the nation. While many other factors contribute as well, one of the main causes is the prevalence of visits from patients who don't truly need emergency care.

Under Maryland's unique Total Cost of Care agreement with the federal government, Maryland's hospitals are working to lower costs and improve population health. In addition to treating illness and injury, hospitals are reaching out beyond their four walls to keep people well and improve the health of the communities they serve. The result: hospitals are taking care of the whole person, empowering patients and families, coordinating care among different providers, and addressing social factors that influence people's health. Expanding access to dental coverage would help reduce Medicaid enrollees' reliance on emergency departments for their dental needs, contribute to efforts to shorten wait times and help patients receive the right care in the right setting.

For these reasons, we urge you to give *SB 220 a favorable report* to remove the provision that would end this pilot program contingent on the Maryland Dental Access Coalition sharing certain findings.