

## **Community Statement on Medicare Coverage for Medically Necessary Oral and Dental Health Therapies**

The undersigned organizations are proud to join in support of Medicare coverage for medically-necessary oral/dental health therapies.

It is well established that chronic diseases disproportionately impact Medicare beneficiaries and impose a substantial cost on the federal government. It is also well established that untreated oral microbial infections are closely linked to a wide range of costly chronic conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, dementia, and stroke. In addition, oral diseases have been documented by researchers and medical specialty societies as precluding, delaying, and even jeopardizing medical treatments such as organ and stem cell transplantation, heart valve repair or replacement, cancer chemotherapies, placement of orthopedic prostheses, and management of autoimmune diseases.

Despite these factors, most Medicare beneficiaries do not currently receive oral/dental care even when medically necessary for the treatment of Medicare-covered diseases. In fact, Medicare coverage extends to the treatment of all microbial infections except for those relating to the teeth and periodontium. There is simply no medical justification for this exclusion, especially in light of the broad agreement among medical specialists that such care is integral to the medical management of numerous diseases and medical conditions. Moreover, the lack of medically necessary oral/dental care heightens the risk of costly medical complications, increasing the financial burden on Medicare, beneficiaries, and taxpayers.

At least six major insurance carriers offering dental plans provide enhanced periodontal and preventive coverage to targeted enrollees with conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, head/neck cancers, and transplants. According to some reports, such coverage has realized important benefits, including markedly lower hospitalization and emergency department admission rates as well as substantial cost reductions. On a further note, veterans getting care through the Veterans Health Administration receive medically adjunctive oral/dental treatment in many instances when a dental diagnosis affects their medical prognosis. These are all important steps forward, and medically necessary oral/dental healthcare including periodontal treatment should be provided in traditional Medicare as well.

The Medicare program and all its beneficiaries should not be without the vital clinical and fiscal benefits of coverage for medically necessary oral/dental health therapies. Given the significant potential to improve health outcomes and reduce program costs, we urge Congress and the Administration to explore options for extending such evidence-based coverage for all Medicare beneficiaries.

AARP  
Acuity Specialists  
American Academy of Maxillofacial Prosthetics  
American Academy of Periodontology  
American Association for Dental Research  
American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists  
American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons  
American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association  
American College of Emergency Physicians  
American College of Gastroenterology  
American College of Physicians  
American College of Prosthodontists  
American College of Rheumatology  
American Dental Association  
American Dental Education Association  
American Dental Hygienists' Association  
American Diabetes Association  
American Head and Neck Society  
American Kidney Fund  
American Liver Foundation  
American Nurses Association  
American Parkinson's Disease Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Public Health Association  
American Society for Radiation Oncology  
American Society of Clinical Oncology  
American Society of Transplant Surgeons  
American Thoracic Society  
Arthritis Foundation  
Association of Dental Support Organizations  
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors  
California Dental Association  
Catholic Health Association of the United States  
Center for Medicare Advocacy  
Children's Dental Health Project  
Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America  
Dental Lifeline Network  
Dental Trade Alliance  
Eating Disorders Coalition  
Epilepsy Foundation  
Families USA  
Head and Neck Cancer Alliance  
Justice in Aging  
Leukemia and Lymphoma Society  
Lupus Foundation of America  
Medicare Rights Center  
Mental Health America  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging  
National Association of Community Health Centers  
National Association of Dental Plans  
National Council for Behavioral Health  
National Kidney Foundation  
National Multiple Sclerosis Society  
National Network for Oral Health Access  
National Osteoporosis Foundation  
National Rural Health Association  
National Stroke Association  
Oral Health America  
Pacific Dental Services Foundation  
Parkinson's Foundation  
PEW Dental Campaign  
Renal Physicians Association  
Santa Fe Group  
School-Based Health Alliance  
Society for Transplant Social Workers  
Support for Persons with Oral, Head, and Neck Cancer  
The Gerontological Society of America  
The Michael J. Fox Foundation  
The Society for Thoracic Surgeons