Better Care, Lower Cost

Consortium for Medically Necessary Oral Health Coverage

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Public Statement on Medicare Coverage of Medically Necessary Oral and Dental Health Therapies

Beginning in 2016, a consortium was formed among the undersigned dental and medical specialists, patient and consumer advocates, and care delivery providers to support and advocate for Medicare coverage of medically necessary oral and dental care. Today, the Consortium applauds the Biden Administration and Congressional champions for taking action that will have a direct and meaningful impact in the lives of tens of millions of Medicare beneficiaries.

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 have been unable to receive oral/dental care even when medically necessary for the treatment of Medicare-covered diseases. Historically, Medicare coverage has extended to the treatment of all microbial infections except for those relating to the teeth and periodontium. Believing there is no medical justification for this exclusion, the Consortium formed to express broad consensus among health care providers that such care is integral to the medical management of numerous diseases and medical conditions and that the lack of medically necessary oral/dental care heightens the risk of costly medical complications, increasing the financial burden on Medicare, beneficiaries, and taxpayers.

In recognition of these facts, the Biden Administration has proposed transformative action to extend Medicare coverage to dental services that are integral to the delivery of covered medical services. Specifically, the Physician Fee Schedule for Fiscal Year 2023 issued yesterday by HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra and CMS Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure proposes to meaningfully broaden reimbursement for medically necessary dental services. The proposed rule also opens an exciting opportunity for stakeholders to provide “comments on other types of clinical scenarios where dental services may be inextricably linked to, and substantially related and integral to the clinical success of, other covered medical services” as well as on a process for public submission of recommendations for identifying the circumstances when the policy may apply and the payment models that will support it.
“This important announcement marks a new day in the health of Medicare beneficiaries,” said Dr. Michael Alfano, D.M.D., Ph.D., cofounder of the Santa Fe Group and the Consortium. “Thanks to the tireless work of literally hundreds of organizations and thousands of dedicated advocates, Americans will no longer lack access to medically necessary oral and dental treatment within the traditional Medicare program.”

Dr. Cheryl Lee, President of the National Dental Association said, “We support this policy change as it represents significant progress towards a more equitable healthcare delivery system. Most importantly, it will expand access and improve outcomes while also reducing hospitalizations and Medicare program costs.”

Due to their conviction that the Medicare program and its beneficiaries should not be without the vital clinical and fiscal benefits of medically necessary oral/dental health therapies, more than 230 leading organizations joined as signatories of the Consortium’s Community Statement to urge Congress and the Administration to explore options for extending such evidence-based coverage for all Medicare beneficiaries.

“For too long Medicare beneficiaries have suffered due to a lack of coverage for medically necessary dental care crucial to treating other conditions,” said Center for Medicare Advocacy Executive Director Judith Stein. “Now, thanks to the determined efforts of this broad group of organizations, and the recognition of the administration, we look forward to a future of better health and quality of life, and greater program equity.”

In light of yesterday’s historic announcement, the Consortium will now turn to the important process of securing implementation of medically necessary coverage. Formal comments will be submitted, and community leaders will lend their expertise as the Administration works to formalize this policy in the manner best suited to meet the needs of Medicare beneficiaries.

The signatories of the Consortium’s Community Statement are listed below:

- AARP
- ABLE NH (Advocates Building Lasting Equality in NH)
- ACA Consumer Advocacy
- Acuity Specialists
- Adenoid Cystic Carcinoma Research Foundation
- AIDS Foundation of Chicago
- Alliance for Retired Americans
- Allies for Independence
- ALS Association
- American Academy of Nursing
- American Academy of Periodontology
- American Association for Community Dental Programs
- American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research
- American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists
- American Association of Colleges of Nursing
- American Association of Diabetes Educators
- American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons
- American Association of Kidney Patients
- American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons
- American Association of Nurse Practitioners
- American Association of Public Health Dentistry
- American Association on Health and Disability
- American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association
- American College of Cardiology
- American College of Emergency Physicians
- American College of Gastroenterology
- American College of Physicians
- American College of Rheumatology
- American Dental Assistants Association
- American Dental Education Association
- American Dental Hygienists’ Association
- American Diabetes Association
- American Geriatrics Society
American Head and Neck Society
American Heart Association
American Institute of Dental Public Health
American Kidney Fund
American Liver Foundation
American Medical Association
American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP)
American Nephrology Nurses’ Association
American Network of Oral Health Coalitions
American Nurses Association
American Parkinson Disease Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Public Health Association
American Society for Radiation Oncology
American Society of Clinical Oncology
American Society of Nephrology
American Society of Transplant Surgeons
American Society of Transplantation
American Thoracic Society
Arcora Foundation
Arizona Oral Health Coalition
Arthritis Foundation
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
Association of Community Cancer Centers
Association of Oncology Social Work
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Be a Hero
Brain Injury Association of America
California Dental Association
California Medical Association
CareQuest Institute for Oral Health
Carlson Foley Enterprises
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Center for Advocacy for the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (CARIE)
Center for Elder Law & Justice
Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation
Center for Medicare Advocacy
Center for Popular Democracy
Champaign County Health Care Consumers
Children’s Dental Health Project
Coalition for Oral Health for the Aging
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities
Colgate Palmolive Company
Colorado Consumer Health Initiative
Community Catalyst
Community Dental Health NPO
Connecticut Oral Health Initiative
Cornerstone Dental Specialties
Crohn’s and Colitis Foundation of America
Culpeper Wellness Foundation
Davis Phinney Foundation for Parkinson’s
Delaware Dental Hygienists’ Association
Dental Lifeline Network
Dental Trade Alliance
Dentsply Sirona
Dialysis Patient Citizens
Dientes Community Dental Care
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Eating Disorders Coalition
Elderly Housing Development & Operations Corporation
Epilepsy Foundation
EXCELth, Inc.
Families USA
504HealthNet
Florida Health Justice Project
Georgia AIDS Coalition
Georgians for a Healthy Future
Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association
GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality
Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing
Hawai‘i Oral Health Coalition
Hawai‘i Children's Action Network Speaks!
Head and Neck Cancer Alliance
Health Care For All (MA)
Health Care Is a Human Right WA
Health Care Voices
Healthy Living and Learning Center
Heartland Alliance
Henry Schein Cares Foundation
HIV Medicine Association
Hispanic Dental Association
International Pemphigus and Pemphigoid Foundation
Island Liaison, Inc.
John A. Hartford Foundation
Jon C Burr Foundation
Justice in Aging
Kentucky Oral Health Coalition
Klamath Basin Oral Health Coalition
Lakeshore Foundation
Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
Louisiana Primary Care Association
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Lupus Foundation of America
Maryland Dental Action Coalition
Massachusets ME/CFS and FM Assoc
Medicaid|Medicare|CHIP Services Dental Association
Medicare Rights Center
Mended Hearts
Mental Health America
Metro New York Health Care for All
Michigan Primary Care Association