

## **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 Diabetes Educators  
 American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons  
 American Association of Kidney Patients  
 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 Prosthodontists  
 American College of Rheumatology  
 American Dental Association  
 American Dental Education Association  
 American Dental Hygienists' Association  
 American Diabetes Association  
 American Geriatrics Society  
 American Head and Neck Society  
 American Kidney Fund  
 American Liver Foundation  
 American Nurses Association  
 American Parkinson Disease Association  
 American Psychiatric 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  
 Arthritis Foundation  
 Association of Community Cancer Centers  
 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  
 Cornerstone Dental Specialties  
 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  
 John A. Hartford Foundation  
 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 Association of Social Workers (NASW)  
 National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities  
 National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare  
 National Council for Behavioral Health  
 National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention  
 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  
 Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association  
 ProHEALTH Dental  
 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