



To: Members of the Ohio House of Representatives
From: David Maywhoor, Project Director, 614-456-0060 ext 225
Date: March 31, 2015
Re: Medicaid Reimbursement Rates for Dental Providers

We appreciate that the Governor included in his budget proposal a modest increase in the Medicaid reimbursement rates for dentists. His proposal to increase reimbursement rates raises the important question of adequacy of the dental provider network for Medicaid enrollees.

We support the proposed one percent increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates but also ask you to consider the Ohio Dental Association's request to do more. In his testimony on March 18, 2015 before the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, Executive Director, David Owsiany, suggested a 10 to 12 percent increase in reimbursement rates. With an investment of \$7.5 million in state dollars in FY 2016 and \$15 million in state dollars in FY 2017, this could be achieved.

In Ohio, too many Medicaid enrollees do not have access to dentists. In 2012, of Medicaid-eligible children up to age two, only 7.9 percent had a dental visit. (The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry states that children should see a dentist when they get their first tooth and not later than one year of age). For Medicaid eligible children ages three to 18, 46.2 percent had a dental visit. Adults fare much worse than children. For adults ages 19 to 64, only 27.7 percent had a dental visit, and for adults 65 and older, only 20.1 percent had a dental visit.

Part of the problem is that only 35.6 percent of dentists participate in the Medicaid program and see at least one patient. Fewer than half of those dentists—just 15.8 percent of dentists—see a substantial number (250 or more) of patients covered by Medicaid. Some dentists cite Medicaid's low reimbursement rates as a reason they do not take more or any Medicaid covered patients.

Access to oral health care is the number one unmet health need for children and low-income adults. Ohio needs more dentists to serve Medicaid patients. Several studies show that increased reimbursement rates do increase provider participation and increase utilization. However, these studies also acknowledge that reimbursement rates alone will not adequately address the access to oral health care problem.

In addition, to needing more dentists serving Medicaid patients, Ohio needs more providers of restorative care too. We will not adequately solve the access to oral health care problem without expanding the dental care team.

Minnesota is one state that uses mid-level providers called Dental Therapists. The Minnesota Department of Health found that mid-level providers are expanding access to quality, affordable care and meeting the needs of underserved populations. In 2014, the Department reported that the dental therapy workforce is growing and appears to be fulfilling statutory intent by serving predominantly low-income, uninsured and underserved patients and that savings from the lower costs of dental therapists are making it more possible for clinics to expand capacity to see public program and underserved patients.

While it is not a silver-bullet solution to improve access, increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for dentists is overdue. It is a much-needed piece of a larger and more complex puzzle, which also includes modernizing our dental workforce with new mid-level providers.

We ask you to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for dentists and challenge you to make improving Ohio's dismal record on oral health care a high priority in this General Assembly. We look forward to working with you to ensure all Ohioans access to oral health care.