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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO MEDICAID BENEFITS.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1           SECTION 1. The legislature finds that oral disease is a  
2 significant health problem among many Hawaii residents,  
3 affecting their overall health and well-being. Since 2010,  
4 Hawaii has received a failing grade of "F" in three oral health  
5 report cards published by the Pew Center on the States due to  
6 multiple policy and systems issues in the State that have left  
7 the oral health of Hawaii's families and children in a state  
8 that is worse than the rest of the nation.

9           Access to regular oral health care varies greatly across  
10 the State, with rural and neighbor island residents and persons  
11 with low-income families experiencing greater access issues.  
12 Currently, approximately 180,000 adult medicaid beneficiaries  
13 are not getting the benefit of early oral disease detection and  
14 treatment for better overall health. Lack of access to dental  
15 coverage and oral health care is a health and social justice  
16 issue that disproportionately affects the poor, children, the  
17 elderly, and racial and ethnic minority groups.



1           In 2009, the State terminated all preventative and  
2 restorative dental care services for adult medicaid recipients  
3 and replaced it with emergency room services that are limited to  
4 pain relief, injuries, trauma, and tooth removal and extraction.  
5 Nationally, studies have shown that reducing or eliminating  
6 medicaid adult dental benefits has led to significant increases  
7 in dental-related emergency room visits and associated costs.  
8 In 2012 alone, Hawaii medicaid paid \$4,800,000 for 1,691 adults  
9 for emergency room visits for preventable oral health problems,  
10 according to the department of health's Hawaii Oral Health: Key  
11 Findings report.

12           The legislature further finds that in Hawaii, a  
13 disproportionate number of adult medicaid beneficiaries ages  
14 twenty-one and older utilize emergency dental services. While  
15 these adult medicaid beneficiaries are twenty-five per cent of  
16 Hawaii's population, they represent fifty-six per cent of all  
17 emergency dental services. Just over three thousand emergency  
18 room visits for acute oral health conditions occurred in 2016,  
19 totaling over \$17,000,000 in direct costs, a cost that has more  
20 than doubled since 2007. data also indicated that rural  
21 residents of the State, primarily from the north shore of Oahu



1 and the islands of Kauai and Hawaii, were more likely than urban  
2 residents to go to the emergency room for dental problems.

3 The lack of preventative and restorative dentistry services  
4 for adult medicaid beneficiaries increases potential health care  
5 complications and costs for individuals living with diabetes,  
6 including an increased incidence of gum disease, increased  
7 difficulty controlling diabetes, and an increased likelihood of  
8 coronary artery disease. These complications can lead to  
9 increased disability and death. For diabetic medicaid  
10 beneficiaries, increased access to dental care could result in a  
11 cost savings between \$118,000 and \$1,700,000 for diabetic  
12 medical care for all beneficiaries, according to 2019 estimates  
13 by the Healthy Policy Institute of the American Dental  
14 Association.

15 The legislature also finds that for pregnant adult medicaid  
16 beneficiaries, ensuring good oral health during pregnancy may  
17 reduce pregnancy complications such as pre-eclampsia, giving  
18 birth too soon, or having low birth-weight babies. The average  
19 cost of services for the birth of a healthy newborn is  
20 approximately \$5,000. In contrast, the cost of services for a



1 premature or underweight newborn can range from \$200,000 to  
2 \$2,000,000.

3 Poor oral health is clinically proven to have serious  
4 adverse impact on overall health and well-being. It is linked  
5 to an array of acute and chronic health conditions including  
6 heart disease, diabetes, stroke, depression, low birth weight,  
7 and premature birth among others. Tooth decay is almost  
8 completely preventable. However, preventive services, early  
9 diagnosis, and interventions that can halt or slow the  
10 progression of most oral diseases is currently unavailable to  
11 adult medicaid beneficiaries in the State. Problems that could  
12 have been addressed early, or even prevented, continue to  
13 progress, leading to poor health outcomes and lower quality of  
14 life.

15 Dental care coverage is positively associated with access  
16 to and utilization of oral health care. Research indicates that  
17 children and adults with dental coverage are significantly more  
18 likely to seek and use regular dental services than those who  
19 are uninsured.

20 Individuals enrolled in medicaid have an increased  
21 likelihood of disparities in health care outcomes based on



1 income. The prevalence of dental disease and tooth loss is  
2 disproportionately high among low-income populations.  
3 Insufficient coverage or access to care often further  
4 disadvantages medicaid recipients, driving poor health outcomes  
5 and higher costs.

6 The legislature additionally finds that expanded adult  
7 dental benefits can have tremendous positive impacts on state  
8 medicaid populations. It has been shown that individuals with  
9 dental benefits are forty-two per cent more likely to have a  
10 dental checkup within the year than individuals who do not have  
11 coverage. Parents who receive dental care are also more likely  
12 to take their children to the dentist as well.

13 Medicaid provides federal funds for health care coverage to  
14 eligible individuals with low incomes, including children and  
15 their parents, pregnant women, the elderly, and persons with  
16 disabilities. The federal government will match up to fifty per  
17 cent of a state's investment in reinstating preventative and  
18 restorative dental benefits for adult medicaid beneficiaries.

19 Although comprehensive dental coverage is mandatory for  
20 children enrolled in medicaid, dental benefits for medicaid-  
21 eligible adults are optional. Currently, thirty-four states



1 offer comprehensive or limited preventive and restorative  
2 benefits to adults on medicaid.

3 The legislature further finds that adding expanded dental  
4 services benefits for the State's adult medicaid enrollees will  
5 reduce the number of acute oral health-related emergency room  
6 visits and improve these individuals' chronic disease risks and  
7 overall health status. Current estimates on costs of restoring  
8 expanded benefits to adult medicaid recipients in Hawaii that  
9 will provide a range of preventive and restorative benefits for  
10 recipients to help maintain and improve their oral health are  
11 being developed by the department of human services MedQuest  
12 division.

13 It has been over a decade since the State removed all but  
14 emergency medicaid adult dental benefits. The legislature finds  
15 that it is in the best interest of the State and its residents  
16 to expand access to care by restoring dental benefits to adult  
17 medicaid enrollees.

18 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to appropriate  
19 funds to restore diagnostic, preventive, and restorative dental  
20 benefits to adult medicaid enrollees.



1 SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general  
2 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$7,000,000 or so much  
3 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2020-2021 to restore  
4 diagnostic, preventive, and restorative dental benefits to adult  
5 medicaid enrollees; provided that the department of human  
6 services shall obtain the maximum federal matching funds  
7 available for this expenditure.

8 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of  
9 human services for the purposes of this Act.

10 SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on December 31,  
11 2059.



**Report Title:**

Adult Dental Benefits; Medicaid; Appropriation

**Description:**

Appropriates funds to restore diagnostic, preventive, and restorative dental benefits to adult Medicaid enrollees, provided DHS obtains maximum federal matching funds available. Takes effect on December 31, 2059. (HD1)

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