



Maine Equal Justice

People Policy Solutions

Dental Care is Health Care: Support An Act to Improve Dental Health for Maine Adults with Low Incomes

A lack of dental coverage leaves Maine behind.

Experts and community members alike from across Maine say a lack of affordable dental care for adults is a serious problem. Poor dental health negatively impacts Mainers' overall health, employability, communication, and social interaction.

Unmet dental needs have human and economic costs, driving up ER use and posing a considerable financial burden to Maine hospitals. Here in Maine 45% of people with low income say they avoid smiling because of the state of their teeth and mouth; 1 in 3 people say the appearance of their mouth and teeth affects their ability to get a job.¹

Oral health is linked to chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke, as well as premature births and low birth weights.² Yet MaineCare, Maine's Medicaid program, limits dental care for adults strictly to emergency care necessary to eliminate pain, infection or prevent imminent tooth loss.

As the nation increasingly recognizes the importance of dental care in overall health, two-thirds of the states now provide more extensive dental services for adults including preventive and restorative care. States receive federal matching funds at the same rate as other Medicaid services for dental care.

This bill meets Mainers' critical dental health by improving:

➤ **Coverage:** Include comprehensive preventive, diagnostic and restorative dental care for adults covered by MaineCare; and

➤ **Access:** Create a dental fee incentive payment to reward dental providers who significantly increase the number of MaineCare children and adults they serve or those who serve a disproportionate share of MaineCare members in their practice.



Mainers' dental needs are urgent

"Not having dental has been the biggest embarrassment of my life. In order to get services, I have to wait until they are rotting out of my head. I've lost my smile and it feels like I'm not me anymore. I worry that I am an embarrassment to my son and make an effort not to show my teeth."

"I need a cleaning and most likely fillings, I haven't been to the dentist as an adult. So at least 10 years. I am scared of when the pain will start."

Get updates and action alerts. Contact [Kathy Kilrain del Rio](mailto:kkilraindelrio@mejp.org) at kkilraindelrio@mejp.org or 207-626-7058

1 American Dental Association. Source: <https://www.ada.org/~/media/ADA/Science%20and%20Research/HPI/OralHealthWell-Being-StateFacts/Maine-Oral-Health-Well-Being.pdf>

2 Source: <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/leading-health-indicators/2020-lhi-topics/Oral-Health>