

Report Highlights

Dental Services for Persons With Disabilities

Senate Resolution 61 called on the LB&FC to conduct a study of dental care for Pennsylvanians with disabilities and to make recommendations to preserve and improve the quality of such care.

The study found:

- **Comprehensive dental services are generally available to children with disabilities.** Children who are enrolled in Medical Assistance (MA), PA's Medicaid program, are eligible for the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment program (EPSDT) which provides comprehensive health care, including dental care. Due to PA's "Loophole Category," almost all children with a serious disability qualify for MA. Children enrolled in the CHIP program also receive dental services.
- **Adults with disabilities are much less likely to qualify for comprehensive dental services.** While states are required to provide dental care for children covered under Medicaid, dental services for adults is optional. PA does include some dental services as part of its MA program for adults, but the Dept. of Human Services (DHS) significantly scaled back the level of benefits in 2011.
- **The federal Affordable Care Act requires insurers to offer a dental plan, but does not require consumers to purchase it.** This should allow broader coverage for persons with disabilities who purchase a dental plan.
- **Thirty of PA's 67 counties had no dentists in the MA fee-for-service plan that were willing or able to accept a special needs patient.** Dentists who are enrolled in a state Medicaid plan indicate on a federal website whether they can accommodate special needs patients and if they are accepting new Medicaid patients. Of the 1,819 PA dentists enrolled as a MA fee-for-service provider, only 148 (8%) indicated they could accommodate special needs patients, and of those, only 107 were accepting new patients.
- **PA is home to many clinics that provide free or low-cost dental services to persons with disabilities.** PA has over 200 Federally Qualified Health Care Centers across the state, 84 of which offer dental services. The PA Dental Association participates in the Donated Dental Services program that recruits dentists to provide services to the disabled and certain other

vulnerable patients. PA's three dental schools operate clinics that provide services to persons with disabilities, as does the Elwyn Institute. Special Smiles Ltd. is an innovative program that provides comprehensive dental services to persons with disabilities enrolled in several Medicaid MCOs in the Philadelphia region.

- **PA dentists report that providing dental services to persons with disabilities is a multi-faceted problem.** We surveyed all 8,100 active PA dentists and received 684 responses. The top factors reported as affecting dental care for persons with disabilities were: low MA reimbursement rates, difficult behavioral issues, and high levels of no-show appointments. Many also cited that the MA program does not cover needed services, burdensome MA rules that discourage provider participation, and lack of training and/or specialized equipment.

Recommendations

- DHS revert to pre-2011 Medicaid dental regulations with regard to the type and frequency of services allowed for adults with disabilities.
- DHS allow dentists to receive Medicaid reimbursement for key preventative services at a greater frequency than for the general Medicaid population.
- DHS increase the amount of the Medicaid Dental Behavioral Management supplement and the number of supplements allowed.
- DHS build on the Special Smiles model to help establish specialty dental clinics in other areas of the Commonwealth.
- DHS work with its Medicaid MCOs to allow reimbursement to dental facilities treating special needs patients who are living in residential facilities outside their Medicaid MCO's geographic boundaries.
- The Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council (PDDC) take the lead in meeting with representatives of PA's three dental schools to explore the training needs identified by Pennsylvania dentists.