

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

Alaska Commission on Aging

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February 2, 2009

The Honorable Representative Mike Hawker, Co-Chair
House Finance Committee
Alaska State Capitol, Room 505
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Subject: Support for Reauthorization of the Medicaid Adult Dental Program

Dear Co-Chair Hawker:

The Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA) encourages support of HB 26, a bill to reauthorize preventive and restorative dental services for adult Medicaid recipients, sponsored by you and co-sponsored by Representative Muñoz. Medicaid coverage for these services will sunset June 30, 2009 without legislative reauthorization.

Good nutrition is vital for health and wellness across the life span and depends on oral health. Dental pain and missing or decayed teeth can affect dietary choices for seniors that may impact overall health and wellness. Without preventive and restorative dental services, which include exams, fillings, extractions, and dentures, vulnerable older Alaskans are at risk of developing dental infections that have been associated with periodontal disease, diabetes, pneumonia, and other chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease. Currently, Medicaid dental services are limited to expensive emergency care for immediate relief of pain and acute infection, with no coverage for preventative and restorative dental care. These limited services often lead to extraction of permanent teeth.

In addition to the health issues involved, decayed or missing teeth can be a significant factor in employability or job advancement, which is of concern to all persons seeking employment, regardless of age. Preventive and restorative dental services result in fewer tooth extractions for Medicaid clients and offer increased chance of employment, according to research findings (University of California, San Francisco School of Dentistry 2004).

Preventive and restorative dental services can help prevent the progression of serious dental disease and discomfort which can result in more costly emergency care. These services promote healthy lifestyles, assist in chronic disease prevention, and help to contain future Medicaid costs for emergency dental work and other related health care problems.

Since inception on April 1, 2007 through September 30, 2008, this program has served 9,267 unduplicated persons, which includes approximately 1,800 persons aged 60 years and older, of who 900 received dentures.

Currently, the limit for services is \$1,150 per year per Medicaid beneficiary. This amount was originally used because it would pay for an exam and either an upper or lower set of dentures. We understand that the average cost for dentures has increased to \$1,700 or \$1,800 per set. The Commission suggests that the cap for services be reconsidered in light of the current costs for providing dental care.

ACoA supports HB 26 and believes this program to be a wise public investment that will help reduce expensive emergency dental needs and associated health care costs, and enhance health and wellness for elderly Alaskans. Please feel free to contact Denise Daniello, ACoA's executive director (465-4879), should you have any questions regarding our position. Thank you for your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



Sharon Howerton-Clark
Chair Alaska Commission on Aging



Denise Daniello
ACoA Executive Director

CC: House HSS Committee Members
Honorable Representative Herron, Co-Chair
Representative Cissna
Representative Lynn
Representative Coghill

Honorable Representative Keller, Co-Chair
Representative Holmes
Representative Seaton