Community Statement on Medicare Coverage for Medically Necessary Oral and Dental Health Therapies

The undersigned organizations are proud to join in support of Medicare coverage for medically-necessary oral/dental health therapies.

It is well established that chronic diseases disproportionately impact Medicare beneficiaries and impose a substantial cost on the federal government. It is also well established that untreated oral microbial infections are closely linked to a wide range of costly chronic conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, dementia, and stroke. In addition, oral diseases have been documented by researchers and medical specialty societies as precluding, delaying, and even jeopardizing medical treatments such as organ and stem cell transplantation, heart valve repair or replacement, cancer chemotherapies, placement of orthopedic prostheses, and management of autoimmune diseases.

Despite these factors, most Medicare beneficiaries do not currently receive oral/dental care even when medically necessary for the treatment of Medicare-covered diseases. In fact, Medicare coverage extends to the treatment of all microbial infections except for those relating to the teeth and periodontium. There is simply no medical justification for this exclusion, especially in light of the broad agreement among health care providers that such care is integral to the medical management of numerous diseases and medical conditions. Moreover, the lack of medically necessary oral/dental care heightens the risk of costly medical complications, increasing the financial burden on Medicare, beneficiaries, and taxpayers.

A number of major insurance carriers provide medically-necessary oral and dental coverage to targeted enrollees with conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, head/neck cancers, and transplants. According to some reports, such coverage has realized important benefits, including markedly lower hospitalization and emergency department admission rates as well as substantial cost reductions. On a further note, veterans getting care through the Veterans Health Administration receive medically adjunctive oral/dental treatment in many instances when a dental diagnosis affects their medical prognosis. These are all important steps forward, and medically necessary oral/dental healthcare should be provided in traditional Medicare as well.

The Medicare program and all its beneficiaries should not be without the vital clinical and fiscal benefits of coverage for medically necessary oral/dental health therapies. Given the significant potential to improve health outcomes and reduce program costs, we urge Congress and the Administration to explore options for extending such evidence-based coverage for all Medicare beneficiaries.
National Health Law Program
National Interprofessional Initiative on Oral Health
National Kidney Foundation
National League for Nursing
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Network for Oral Health Access
National Osteoporosis Foundation
National Rural Health Association
National Stroke Association
Oral Cancer Foundation
Oral Health America
Oral Health Nursing Education and Practice Program
Pacific Dental Services Foundation
Parkinson’s Foundation
Patient-Centered Primary Care Collaborative
PEW Dental Campaign
Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association
ProHEALTH Dental
Renal Physicians Association
Santa Fe Group
School-Based Health Alliance
Scleroderma Foundation
Sjogren’s Syndrome Foundation
Society for Transplant Social Workers
Support for People with Oral and Head and Neck Cancer
The AIDS Institute
The Arc of the United States
The Gerontological Society of America
The Michael J. Fox Foundation
The Society for Thoracic Surgeons
The TMJ Association