

# CONGRESS HAS A SOCIAL AND FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY TO IMPROVE ORAL HEALTH FOR EVERYONE



Everyone in America should have the opportunity to live a healthy life, and oral health is a necessary part of that opportunity. Oral health is key to overall health and wellness, including combating COVID-19 and promoting employment, economic stability, and social connectedness. Currently, millions of people face barriers to oral health such as cost of care or lack of oral health coverage. By eliminating these barriers we will improve oral and overall health. We will also avoid unnecessary costs that result when oral health problems go untreated. Families need policy transformation to ensure that everyone can access adequate oral health coverage and care. The following socially and fiscally responsible actions are meaningful steps Congress should take to achieve that goal:

**Action 1: Congress should add oral health coverage under Medicare Part B covered services.**

- For the roughly 40 million older adults and people with disabilities without oral health coverage, oral health care largely remains out of reach. That problem has only gotten worse as the COVID-19 pandemic assails our communities' health, squeezes family budgets, and exacerbates inequities.
- Oral health care is the number-one health service that people in the U.S. do not get because we cannot afford it, even more so than prescription drugs.
- Adding oral health coverage to Medicare is a critical piece of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recovery, and health equity.

**Consider co-sponsoring:**

- S.97/H.R. 502 Medicare Dental Benefit Act of 2021 (Sen. Cardin/Rep. Barragan)

**Action 2: Congress should ensure oral health coverage for families that rely on Medicaid for health insurance.**

- As Congress focuses on improving maternal health and reducing maternal mortality, securing oral health coverage is an essential part of the solution.

- Despite widespread agreement that oral health care during pregnancy is critical to the health of both mother and child, pregnant women, especially those covered by Medicaid or CHIP, often do not have options to obtain affordable oral health care.

**Action 3: Congress should appropriate an additional \$15 million to the CDC Division of Oral Health to support oral health programs in every state.**

- State oral health programs ensure each state can prevent oral disease and support oral health promotion through prevention, reducing disparities, supporting the oral health workforce, and provide dental services including school-based oral health programs for children.
- The CDC Division of Oral health estimates that an additional \$15M, for a total of \$34.5 million, would fund oral health programs in all 50 states.

***OPEN has organized across the country to ensure healthy outcomes for everyone. The Network has over 2,000 members across an estimated 800 organizations from all 50 states and DC, committed to making sure that everyone has the keys they need to OPEN doors to oral health.***