

April 9, 2021

Members of the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee

Members of the House Appropriations Committee

Pocahontas Building

900 East Main Street

Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Members of the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee and Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

As an Adult Medicaid Dental Benefit will soon go into effect, as approved in the final budget of the 2020 General Assembly, I write to thank you for taking this step to expand access to oral healthcare and to ask you to carefully monitor the program. It is imperative to ensure that it has the intended effect given the very limited annual dollars currently appropriated, relative to the amount necessary to launch a full-fledged, robust adult benefit.

As President of the Virginia Dental Association, representing most practicing dentists in Virginia, I have been working to educate our members on how to participate in the program and to encourage them to do so. We have appreciated the engagement from DMAS throughout the rollout and particularly have been grateful to Dr. Zachary Hairston, DMAS dental consultant, for participating in a recent webinar to answer questions from providers.

In listening to our membership and other stakeholders, we have heard two significant, not-at-all unforeseen concerns, about the Medicaid dental health program:

- Pediatric Program – Launched in 2005 and previously rated as one of the best in the country has had NO increase in reimbursement rates since initiated while expenses to provide dental care have increased. This program continues to be a model for the nation but has not been adequately funded and now we are proposing to put an adult program on top of it with negligible funding.
- Adult Benefits – There is concern that the current budgeting limit will leave a lot of folks waiting within this population who have NOT seen a dentist in a long time, if ever. This program may very well overrun the system. We hope this will not be the case but want you to be prepared for that should it occur. Patients are likely to expect full treatment, with what will be very limited funding, which means the burden of explanation with some potentially very unhappy patients will fall on our membership.

We are also referencing a patient population with copious gross dental needs, potentially significant comorbidities that are often exacerbated by oral disease, and other barriers to treatment including transportation and language, to name a few.

Every dentist I know is motivated by providing his/her patients with the dignity of a healthy mouth and no one in Virginia should have to go weeks or months in pain waiting for necessary treatment. Now that the General Assembly has created an adult dental benefit program, it is important to ensure that the programs, both for adults and children, work efficiently and appropriately.

We will continue to solicit feedback from our members and will be glad to share those findings with you as we move forward. Thank you for your continued attention to increasing access to essential dental care for our fellow Virginians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'F. Iuorno, Jr.', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Frank Iuorno, Jr. DDS
President
Virginia Dental Association