

NEWS RELEASE – IMMEDIATE

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**NH Oral Health Coalition Moves Forward On A
Medicaid Adult Dental Benefit Following Governor's Veto**

Concord, NH – The NH Oral Health Coalition and NH's oral health advocates statewide are moving forward on plans to develop and implement a Medicaid adult dental benefit following Governor Sununu's veto of HB250. The bill would have supported the development of a dental benefit that would provide coverage for adults covered by Medicaid and Medicaid Expansion.

HB250 has strong bi-partisan support and collaboration. Guiding efforts by Senators Cindy Rosenwald, Jeb Bradley, John Reagan, and Shannon Chandley, Representatives Jennifer Bernet, Craig Thompson, Joe Schapiro and many others brought this bill to final, significant majority votes in both the NH House and Senate. A statewide team of providers and advocates worked with the NH Department of Health and Human Services to identify critical elements for design and implementation of a comprehensive and cost-effective adult Medicaid dental benefit.

Untreated dental disease has been negatively associated with multiple medical diagnoses and conditions including heart and lung disease, autoimmune disorders, dementia, and substance misuse treatment and recovery increasing medical costs for these leading causes of death and disability.

Under NH's current "emergency only" dental benefit, dental disease advances to levels of pain, infection, and tooth and tissue damage that interfere with the ability to obtain and maintain employment, learn and study, and achieve and maintain sobriety. At this stage treatment often shifts into the hospital emergency department where it is treated medically with antibiotics and pain medication. Following return to the community, the individual is still unlikely to be able to access the dental service network. Creating a cycle of "expensive care with no repair". Reimbursement for this ineffective cycle of care is paid for under the current Medicaid adult medical benefit.

A recent study published in Health Services Research in June 2020 concludes that states with Medicaid expansion, combined with a comprehensive Medicaid adult dental benefit, show an association that results in reduced utilization for dental related visits in the emergency department. As a Medicaid Expansion state, NH is poised to receive those savings.

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The establishment of a comprehensive Medicaid adult dental benefit is the *doorway to responsible management of limited financial resources* especially during a critical health emergency. It would return dental prevention and treatment to the right place at the right time with earlier lower cost interventions. The proposed model under HB250 places both an expanded adult benefit and the current children's benefit into a managed care model that would address current high cost and support effective medical-dental integration.

While disappointing, the Governor's veto of HB250 will not stop the advancement and development of a statewide Medicaid adult dental benefit that includes preventive and restorative care through responsible and effective use of scarce financial resources.

The New Hampshire Oral Health Coalition is the only in-state group of organizations, agencies, and individuals, focused solely on the status and impact of oral health issues facing New Hampshire. With a focus on oral health provision, planning, policymaking and funding, we are putting the "mouth back into the body" in support of overall health. Our NH Coalition is recognized on a state and national level for our work on oral health equity, access and integration, and for our ability to engage diverse partners in new, innovative collaborations to support the variety of initiatives addressing the oral healthcare needs of our state.

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