

BETTER CARE, LOWER COST

Consortium for Medically Necessary Oral Health Coverage

*For Immediate Release
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Statement on Proposed Medicare Payment Clarification for Medically Necessary Oral and Dental Health Therapies

It is well-established that overall health is inextricably linked to oral health. Nevertheless, dental care has long been inaccessible to millions of Medicare beneficiaries, leading to an alarming situation in which two-thirds of older Americans have periodontal disease and one-fifth have lost all of their teeth. Untreated oral conditions also significantly increase beneficiaries' risk of suffering chronic conditions, resulting in impaired well-being, shorter lives, and higher Medicare costs. As a result, the Consortium is pleased to welcome the proposed Medicare Physician Fee Schedule for 2024, which proposes to take another important step forward for Medicare beneficiaries and oral systemic health.

Last year, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) took an historic first step when it clarified in the Physician Fee Schedule for 2023 that Medicare payment is available for dental services that are inextricably linked to and substantially related and integral to the clinical success of Medicare-covered medical services. On that basis, CMS specifically recognized payment in the context of organ transplant surgery, cardiac valve replacement, valvuloplasty procedures, and head and neck cancers.

Importantly, the 2023 Physician Fee Schedule also established an annual process enabling stakeholders to nominate additional clinical scenarios for Medicare payment. Implemented this calendar year, the new nominations process marks the first time stakeholders have been able to propose for CMS' formal consideration covered medical services for which clinical evidence demonstrates that dental care is inextricably linked and substantially related and integral to their clinical success. In response, CMS received numerous nominations spanning a broad range of medical conditions and covered services.

In the proposed Physician Fee Schedule for 2024, the Agency proposes clarification of payment for:

- Dental and oral examinations performed as part of a comprehensive workup for Medicare beneficiaries with cancer prior to the administration of chemotherapy, chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy, and high-dose bone-modifying agents (antiresorptive therapy).
- Diagnostic and treatment services (which may include imaging, anesthesia, operating room use, and other ancillary services) to eliminate oral or dental infection prior to or concurrent with the administration of chemotherapy, CAR T-cell therapy, and high-dose bone-modifying agents.
- Dental and oral examinations as well as diagnostic and treatment services for beneficiaries receiving Medicare-covered treatment for head and neck cancer, whether primary or metastatic, regardless of site of origin, and regardless of initial modality of treatment.

In addition, CMS requested comments on whether payment should also be made for beneficiaries receiving radiation therapy and encouraged stakeholders to submit additional nominations for potential inclusion in the proposed Physician Fee Schedule for 2025. Towards that end, CMS provided valuable insights into their decision making process that will aid in the targeting of future nominations.

For these reasons, the Consortium applauds the Biden Administration and the exemplary team at CMS, as well as the many Members of Congress who actively urged CMS to further clarify the Medicare program's payment of medically necessary oral and dental services. With nearly two-thirds of each year's cancer diagnoses suffered by Americans aged 65 and older, the efforts taken by these leaders to further clarify Medicare payment policy will have a direct and meaningful impact in the lives of millions of beneficiaries and their families.

Chemotherapy is associated with serious oral and systemic side effects, including mucositis, sepsis, oral bleeding, candidiasis, and salivary changes. Similarly, radiation therapy can permanently damage tissue and put patients at risk for oral complications, including xerostomia, mucositis, trismus, severe tooth decay, dysphagia, dysgeusia, and medication-related osteonecrosis of the jaw (MRONJ), the latter of which is also a regular consequence of high-dose bisphosphonate treatment for breast cancer and antiangiogenic therapies to treat multiple myeloma.

“By further clarifying Medicare payment of medically necessary dental care for beneficiaries with cancer, CMS is charting an important course to improved outcomes and lower costs,” said Dr. Judith Haber on behalf of the Sante Fe Group. “Cancer strikes nearly one million older Americans annually, and CMS’ proposal will help ensure they have access to the medically necessary oral care they need.”

“We applaud this enhanced clarification of Medicare payment policy and the progress it makes towards more equitable health care for people who rely on Medicare for their health insurance,” said Melissa Burroughs, Director for Strategic Partnerships at Families USA. “In this rule, CMS demonstrates it heard stakeholders’ request for more clarity on how to effectively seek additional payment clarification, and what it has provided will be of tremendous help.”

Due to a shared conviction that Medicare and its beneficiaries should not be without the vital clinical and fiscal benefits of medically necessary oral and dental care, more than 240 leading organizations joined as signatories of the Consortium’s Community Statement to urge the Administration and Congress to explore options for extending evidence-based treatment to all Medicare beneficiaries.

“For decades, Medicare beneficiaries suffered due to a lack of access to medically necessary dental care,” said Center for Medicare Advocacy Executive Director Judith Stein. “Thanks to the evidence-based action the Medicare program continues to take, we are moving closer and closer to a future of better health, improved quality of life, and greater program equity.”

The Consortium will once again be engaged in the rulemaking process as we work to secure adoption of CMS’ proposal and pursue the implementation of all such payment clarifications consistent with their intent. Formal comments will be submitted, and community leaders will lend their expertise as the Administration works to formalize and implement this policy in the manner best suited to meet the needs of Medicare beneficiaries.

The signatories of the Consortium's Community Statement are listed below:

AARP
ABLE NH (Advocates Building Lasting Equality in NH)
ACA Consumer Advocacy
Acuity Specialists
Adenoid Cystic Carcinoma Research Foundation
AIDS Foundation of Chicago
Alliance for Retired Americans
Allies for Independence
ALS Association
American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry
American Academy of Nursing
American Academy of Oral Medicine
American Academy of Oral Systemic Health
American Academy of Periodontology
American Association for Community Dental Programs
American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research
American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists
American Association of Colleges of Nursing
American Association of Diabetes Educators
American Association of Hip and Knee Surgeons
American Association of Kidney Patients
American Association of Nurse Practitioners
American Association of Public Health Dentistry
American Association on Health and Disability
American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association
American College of Cardiology
American College of Emergency Physicians
American College of Gastroenterology
American College of Physicians
American College of Rheumatology
American Dental Assistants Association
American Dental Education Association
American Dental Hygienists' Association
American Diabetes Association
American Geriatrics Society
American Head and Neck Society
American Heart Association
American Institute of Dental Public Health
American Kidney Fund
American Liver Foundation
American Medical Association
American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP)
American Nephrology Nurses' Association
American Network of Oral Health Coalitions
American Nurses Association
American Parkinson Disease Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychiatric Nurses Association
American Public Health Association
American Society for Radiation Oncology
American Society of Clinical Oncology
American Society of Nephrology
American Society of Transplant Surgeons
American Society of Transplantation
American Thoracic Society
Arcora Foundation
Arizona Oral Health Coalition
Arthritis Foundation
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations
Association of Community Cancer Centers
Association of Oncology Social Work
Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Be a Hero
Brain Injury Association of America
California Dental Association
California Medical Association
CareQuest Institute for Oral Health
Carlson Foley Enterprises
Catholic Health Association of the United States
Center for Advocacy for the Rights and Interests of the Elderly
Center for Elder Law & Justice
Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation
Center for Medicare Advocacy
Center for Popular Democracy
Champaign County Health Care Consumers
Children's Dental Health Project
Coalition for Oral Health for the Aging
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities
Colgate Palmolive Company
Colorado Consumer Health Initiative
Community Catalyst
Community Dental Health NPO
Connecticut Oral Health Initiative
Cornerstone Dental Specialties
Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America
Culpeper Wellness Foundation
Davis Phinney Foundation for Parkinson's
Delaware Dental Hygienists' Association
Dental Lifeline Network
Dental Trade Alliance
Dentsply Sirona
Dialysis Patient Citizens
Dientes Community Dental Care
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Eating Disorders Coalition
Elderly Housing Development & Operations Corporation
Epilepsy Foundation
EXCELth, Inc.
Families USA
504HealthNet
Florida Health Justice Project
Georgia AIDS Coalition
Georgians for a Healthy Future
Gerontological Advanced Practice Nurses Association
GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality
Haleon
Hartford Institute for Geriatric Nursing
Hawaii Oral Health Coalition
Hawaii Children's Action Network Speaks!
Head and Neck Cancer Alliance
Health Care For All (MA)
Health Care Is a Human Right WA
Health Care Voices
Healthy Living and Learning Center
Heartland Alliance
Henry Schein Cares Foundation
HIV Medicine Association
Hispanic Dental Association
International Pemphigus and Pemphigoid Foundation
Island Liaison, Inc.
John A. Hartford Foundation

Jon C Burr Foundation
Justice in Aging
Kentucky Oral Health Coalition
Klamath Basin Oral Health Coalition
Lakeshore Foundation
Leukemia and Lymphoma Society
Louisiana Primary Care Association
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
Lupus Foundation of America
Maryland Dental Action Coalition
Massachusetts ME/CFS and FM Assoc
Medicaid|Medicare|CHIP Services Dental Association
Medicare Rights Center
Mended Hearts
Mental Health America
Metro New York Health Care for All
Michigan Primary Care Association
Minnesota Dental Therapy Association
myNEXUS
National Alliance of State & Territorial AIDS Directors
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Area Agencies on Aging
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
National Association of Community Health Centers
National Association of Dental Plans
National Association of Nutrition and Aging
Services Programs
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of States United for Aging
and Disabilities
National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity
National Comprehensive Cancer Network
National Committee to Preserve Social Security
and Medicare
National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care
National Consumers League
National Council for Behavioral Health
National Council on Aging
National Dental Association
National Forum for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Health Law Program
National Interprofessional Initiative on Oral Health
National Kidney Foundation
National League for Nursing
National Medical Association
National Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Network for Oral Health Access
National Osteoporosis Foundation
National Rural Health Association
National Stroke Association
North American Transplant Coordinators Organization
Northwest Harvest
Nurses for America
Nursing Interventions for Health System Elders
NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing
Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans Educational Fund
Oklahoma Policy Institute
Oncology Nursing Society
Oral Cancer Foundation
Oral Health Kansas
Oral Health Nursing Education and Practice Program
Oral Health Ohio
Oral Health Progress and Equity Network (OPEN)

Our Mother's Voice
PA Coalition for Oral Health
Pacific Dental Services Foundation
Parkinson's Foundation
Patient-Centered Primary Care Collaborative
Pennsylvania Health Access Network
PEW Dental Campaign
Piedmont Regional Dental Clinic
PRC
Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association
Pride At Work - WA North, Mt. Kulshan Chapter
Procter & Gamble
ProHEALTH Dental
Project Accessible Oral Health
Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action (PSARA)
Renal Healthcare Association
Renal Physicians Association
Research!America
Santa Fe Group
School-Based Health Alliance
Scleroderma Foundation
Senior Charity Care Foundation
Senior Mobile Dental
Sepsis Alliance
Sjögren's Foundation
Smiles To Go, LLC
Social Security Works
Society for Transplant Social Workers
Special Care Dentistry Association
Statewide Poverty Action Network
Support for People with Oral and Head and Neck Cancer
Texas Oral Health Coalition, Inc
Texas Parent to Parent
The AIDS Institute
The Arc of the United States
The Bingham Program
The CornerStone Community Development Center
The Gerontological Society of America
The Michael J. Fox Foundation
The National Forum of ESRD Networks
The Society for Thoracic Surgeons
The TMJ Association
Third Way
Tri-Area Community Health
Trust for America's Health
United Health Organization
United Network for Organ Sharing
UUFHCT
Virginia Community Healthcare Association
Virginia Health Catalyst
Virginia Organizing
Virginia Rural Health Association
Washington Healthcare Access Alliance
Wayne County Oral Health Organization
Wesley Living Woodland Homes
West Central Initiative
Western Center on Law and Poverty
Winters Elder Day Council
WomenHeart, The National Coalition for Women
with Heart Disease