

# PROTECT DENTAL HEALTH BENEFITS

## ORAL HEALTH AND PHYSICAL HEALTH ARE TIED AT THE HIP - AND THE JAW

At a time when staying healthy is more important to Pennsylvanians than ever before, quality dental care remains a key component of effective health care delivery under the Pennsylvania Medical Assistance Program (MA). Adult dental benefits help prevent harmful mouth bacteria from entering the bloodstream and causing systemic issues, such as:

### DIABETES

Untreated gum disease makes managing blood glucose levels significantly harder for people with diabetes,<sup>1</sup> a condition that already costs an estimated \$13.4 billion in Pennsylvania each year.<sup>2</sup>

### OPIOID USE

Untreated dental disease can cause a dangerous reliance on the use of opioids to manage dental pain.

### ADVERSE BIRTH OUTCOMES

Gum disease among pregnant women is associated with preterm births, low birthweight infants, and preeclampsia, a potentially fatal pregnancy complication that can cause severe organ damage.<sup>3</sup>



### *In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic...*

A significant number of MA recipients are deemed essential workers at **hospitals, schools, nursing homes, and grocery stores, as well as through home health care, food, and delivery services.**<sup>4</sup> Our health depends on their health.

Moreover, any reduction in adult dental MA benefits will result in the loss of significant federal dollars and cost the Commonwealth exponentially more in the long run. Cutting state funding would mean **losing nearly \$200 million annually** in federal matching funds.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, dental benefits can be life-saving for families on MA living at or near the poverty line, allowing them to absorb the cost of dental disease. **Unmet dental needs can lead many to make costly and futile emergency room or urgent care visits, or rely on opioids to manage pain.**

*A healthy and complete Medical Assistance delivery system actually has a lot in common with a healthy mouth: neglecting either one now leads to a lot more pain in the future.*

<sup>1</sup> Dentaquest Partnership for Oral Health Advancement: Impacts Beyond the Mouth. June 2020.

<sup>2</sup> American Diabetes Association: The Burden of Diabetes in Pennsylvania.

<sup>3</sup> Dentaquest Partnership: Impacts Beyond the Mouth. June 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. Double Jeopardy: Low Wage Workers at Risk for Health and Financial Implications for COVID-19. April 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. Direct Correspondence. 2020.



# ORGANIZATIONS IN SUPPORT

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