



## FACT SHEET: Low-Income Mainers Urgently Need Access to Dental Care

### Maine is being left behind by a lack of accessible, affordable dental care:

- Maine is one of only 13 states that has no adult dental benefit in Medicaid, except for limited emergency care—33 states plus the District of Columbia offer more comprehensive dental benefits or at least free cleanings, while four offer no dental benefits.<sup>i</sup>
- Maine's limited benefit allows enrollees to access care only for relief of pain, infection and imminent tooth loss under defined emergency circumstances. ERs frequently treat abscessed teeth with pain medication and send patients away with no access to follow up treatment to resolve the problem. It's no surprise when they return for more needed emergency care.
- Maine has the lowest dentist participation rate for Medicaid and CHIP in the country (14.4%, compared with a national avg. of 39%).<sup>ii</sup>

### Dental health impacts employment and wellbeing for a painfully high proportion of Mainers:

- More than one in three Maine adults say the condition of their teeth impacts their ability to interview for a job.<sup>iii</sup>
- One in five low-income adults in Maine say their teeth are in poor condition and one in three report anxiety about their dental health.<sup>iv</sup>
- 45% of low-income adults in Maine avoid smiling because of the condition of their teeth. Nearly twice as many low-income Mainers accept that they will lose some teeth as they age, compared with high-income Mainers (79% vs. 42%).<sup>v</sup>

### Dental care is health care—poor oral health impacts our entire health care system:

- A 2010 study by the University of Southern Maine found the top diagnostic reason for ER visits among both MaineCare and uninsured young adults aged 15 through 24 and adults aged 25 through 44 was dental disease.<sup>vi</sup>
- A study conducted in 2017 showed that states with preventive dental care in their Medicaid programs saw medical costs lowered for patients with seven chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and cancer by as much as 31 to 67%.<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Portland Press Herald, accessed at: <https://www.pressherald.com/2018/11/02/free-dental-care-day-highlights-lack-of-dental-coverage-in-maine/>

<sup>ii</sup> American Dental Association, accessed at: [https://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Science%20and%20Research/HPI/Files/HPIGraphic\\_0318\\_1.pdf?la=en](https://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Science%20and%20Research/HPI/Files/HPIGraphic_0318_1.pdf?la=en)

<sup>iii</sup> American Dental Association, accessed at: <https://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Science%20and%20Research/HPI/OralHealthWell-Being-StateFacts/Maine-Oral-Health-Well-Being.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> American Dental Association, accessed at: <https://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Science%20and%20Research/HPI/OralHealthWell-Being-StateFacts/Maine-Oral-Health-Well-Being.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> American Dental Association, accessed at: <https://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Science%20and%20Research/HPI/OralHealthWell-Being-StateFacts/Maine-Oral-Health-Well-Being.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Kilbreth et al, "Analysis of Emergency Department Use in Maine" 2010. Accessed at: <https://muskie.usm.maine.edu/Publications/PHPHP/Maine-Emergency-Department-Use.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> National Association of Dental Plans. Accessed at: <https://www.nadp.org/PressReleases/2017/11/23/nadp-analysis-shows-adults-with-medicaid-preventive-dental-benefits-have-lower-medical-costs-for-chronic-conditions>