

May 6, 2025

The Honorable Bob Ferguson  
Governor, State of Washington  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

**Sent via email**

Dear Gov. Ferguson:

On behalf of the over 4,000 member dentists of the Washington State Dental Association (WSDA) and the hundreds of thousands of patients we serve, I am writing to urge you to veto the provisions in the operating budget that would reduce Medicaid reimbursement rates for adult and pediatric oral health care.

Patients rely on Medicaid for a wide variety of services, including preventive care, restorative care to fill cavities and fight dental caries, treating broken or abscessed teeth, endodontics, extractions, dentures, and both oral sedation and general anesthesia. While recognizing the difficult decisions the Legislature faced in balancing the state's operating budget, any reduction in dental Medicaid reimbursement rates will have negative consequences that can be measured in both human and financial terms. They would have devastating impacts on patient care and be fiscally counterproductive – costing the state more money – in the long run.

Medicaid-covered patients range from children as young as one-year-old to neurodivergent, nonverbal or developmentally disabled adults. Many have additional physical disabilities or face other health challenges that complicate their oral health care. Safely and effectively treating this population takes extra training, specialized skills, and additional treatment time, making inadequate reimbursement rates an even larger barrier to care.

Thanks to previous investments by the Legislature, dental Medicaid reimbursement rates saw modest and long-overdue increases over recent budget cycles. But the rates remain roughly equivalent to those that were in place in 2008 (even ignoring the impacts of inflation over the past 17 years), and they remain approximately 50-65 percent of the reimbursement rates of commercial dental benefit plans. Current rates already place serious financial pressures on the low-income patients who rely on Medicaid coverage. Worse yet, they can cause financially strapped patients to delay pursuing the care they need, which has serious long-term consequences.

Delays in care can lead to increased pain, poor sleep, and problems focusing at school or on the job. They can increase the risk of more serious decay and infection, result in speech and development issues, and create fear and anxiety regarding future dental care. Not only will this increase future dental treatment costs, but because good oral health is a foundation of good overall health, it can also lead to broader health consequences.

To now step away from those recent increases will worsen what are already dangerous coverage disparities in dental Medicaid, a result that would be catastrophic for both the patients who depend on these funds and on the dental practices that work tirelessly to care for them. Many providers are already struggling to keep up with increased costs, severe labor shortages, and the lingering effects of COVID-19 on healthcare infrastructure. Lower reimbursement rates could force them to limit or drop Medicaid patients altogether, reducing access to care, worsening healthcare disparities, and further overwhelming already taxed emergency rooms – the most expensive venue for providing care – increasing costs to the state.


Finally, the proposed cuts will adversely impact dental education in the state. Dental students gain valuable hands-on clinical experience treating Medicaid patients under the close supervision of their instructors. Losing these critically important opportunities to serve live patients will have additional long-term access-to-care impacts in Washington.

While these outcomes represent serious negative impacts for both the immediate and the long-term health of our state, an even more compelling case for vetoing the dental Medicaid cuts was made by one of our central Washington members whose practice serves the Medicaid population almost exclusively:

*“Every patient, every child, every family in my practice deserves access to quality dental care. Medicaid is about ensuring that all families, regardless of financial circumstances, have the opportunity for a healthy future.”*

WSDA members and the patients we serve urge you to use your veto pen to preserve this crucial resource and allow more Washingtonians to enjoy healthy, pain-free oral health. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Chris Dorow, DDS  
President  
Washington State Dental Association