

## AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION HOUSE OF DELEGATES

Resolution: 114  
(A-22)

Introduced by: Senior Physicians Section

Subject: Oral Healthcare IS Healthcare

Referred to: Reference Committee A

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1 Whereas, Nationwide, around 50% of Americans 65 and older lack any source of dental  
2 insurance, and since its inception in 1965, Medicare has only covered dental care under  
3 narrowly prescribed circumstances;<sup>1</sup> and  
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5 Whereas, Nearly half of Americans 65 and over didn't visit a dentist in the last year, citing  
6 expense, (and 12% have not received dental care in five or more years). Nearly one in five have  
7 lost all their natural teeth (even higher in black and non-Hispanic populations);<sup>2</sup> and  
8

9 Whereas, Unaddressed tooth and gum disease dramatically increases the risks of  
10 cardiovascular events such as heart attacks and stroke, and such events are leading causes of  
11 death and disability in Medicare recipients, and there is a correlation between poor oral health  
12 and chronic diseases more common in the elderly, such as diabetes and Alzheimer's, as well as  
13 head and neck cancers;<sup>3</sup> and  
14

15 Whereas, Prevention and treatment of dental diseases is effective in reducing many of these  
16 adverse health consequences;<sup>4</sup> and  
17

18 Whereas, Dental issues are a major source of pain, interfering directly with nutrition and  
19 hydration, and painful dental infections are a common cause of emergency department visits,  
20 some life threatening, requiring hospitalization and major expense; and  
21

22 Whereas, In a 2019 AARP poll, 84 percent of Americans supported adding dental, vision and  
23 hearing coverage to Medicare, even if their costs would increase;<sup>5</sup> and  
24

25 Whereas, In all populations, including seniors, dental issues are a major source of both  
26 economic as well as healthcare disparity;<sup>6</sup> and  
27

28 Whereas, Expanded use of medication for Opioid Use Disorder has seen increasing prescription  
29 of Suboxone in buccal or sublingual form, which delivery method has been shown to  
30 dramatically increase the incidence of severe dental disease, including even loss of all teeth;<sup>7-9</sup>  
31 and  
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33 Whereas, Congress is poised to consider Medicare expansion under various current and  
34 pending proposals; therefore be it  
35

36 **RESOLVED**, That our American Medical Association reaffirm that dental and oral health are  
37 integral components of basic health care and maintenance regardless of age (Reaffirm HOD  
38 Policy); and be it further

1 RESOLVED, That our AMA, through the Center for Health Equity, highlight the substantial  
2 contribution of dental and oral healthcare disparities to health inequity as well as to social and  
3 economic disparities (Directive to Take Action); and be it further  
4

5 RESOLVED, That our AMA support ongoing research, legislative actions and administrative  
6 efforts to promote access to and adequate coverage by public and private payers for  
7 preventative and therapeutic dental services as integral parts of overall health maintenance to  
8 all populations (New HOD Policy); and be it further  
9

10 RESOLVED, That our AMA work with other organizations to explore avenues to promote efforts  
11 to expand Medicare benefits to include preventative and therapeutic dental services, without  
12 additional decreases in Medicare Part B Reimbursements. (Directive to Take Action)

Fiscal Note: Modest - between \$1,000 - \$5,000

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#### REFERENCES

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6. Simon, L. (2022, Jan). Inequity Along the Medical Dental Divide. *AMA Journal of Ethics*, 24 (1), 3-5.
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#### RELEVANT AMA POLICY

##### **Medicare Coverage for Dental Services H-330.872**

Our AMA supports: (1) continued opportunities to work with the American Dental Association and other interested national organizations to improve access to dental care for Medicare beneficiaries; and (2) initiatives to expand health services research on the effectiveness of expanded dental coverage in improving health and preventing disease in the Medicare population, the optimal dental benefit plan designs to cost-effectively improve health and prevent disease in the Medicare population, and the impact of expanded dental coverage on health care costs and utilization.

Citation: CMS Rep. 03, A-19;

##### **Importance of Oral Health in Patient Care D-160.925**

Our AMA: (1) recognizes the importance of (a) managing oral health and (b) access to dental care as a part of optimal patient care; and (2) will explore opportunities for collaboration with the American Dental Association on a comprehensive strategy for improving oral health care and education for clinicians.

Citation: Res. 911, I-16; Reaffirmed: CMS Rep. 03, A-19;