Barriers to Oral Health Care

Patients and providers report encountering various barriers to receiving and providing quality dental care under Medicaid, a joint federal/state program administered by states under broad federal guidelines. Oral health is a cross-cutting priority for CMS, and patients, providers, and state governments all have a role to play in improving oral health.

This visual summarizes interviews with interested parties to better understand experiences of barriers to oral health care.

GOVERNMENT

Legislation
States may allocate more funding to expand oral health care benefits.

Better Funding, Better Coverage
Better reimbursement models, more virtual appointments, and professional opportunities for mid-level providers are possible avenues for increasing access to oral health care.

Fund Clinics
Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) play a vital role in oral health care and use federal funds to sustain services.

PATIENTS

Delays in Care
There are more patients than available providers can see quickly, leading to appointment wait times of 6 months or more.

Missed Appointments
Patients may be unable to attend appointments due to transportation, work, childcare, or provider proximity challenges.

Rural Area Challenges
Mobile dentistry and state offices with mid-level providers can extend care into rural areas that lack providers.

Communication Barriers
Patients rely on community based health workers to bridge cultural and language gaps during appointments.

PROVIDERS

Capped Coverage
Limited coverage can make oral health care more expensive, causing people with Medicaid more out-of-pocket costs.

Teledentistry
The COVID-19 Pandemic has led to increased dental care via televisits. However, some people with Medicaid have limited access.

Provider Participation
Burdensome enrollment, audits, credentialing, low reimbursement, and administrative processes can discourage providers from participating in Medicaid.

Emergency Pain
Due to lack of timely dental care, patients can end up at Emergency Departments for dental related pain. Trips to the ED can be costly and do not solve the root of the problem.

Whole Person Health
Better communication between dental and medical providers can lead to good oral health habits and positive overall health outcomes.

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Standardized Patient Records
Improve patient records through policy and standards to make data easily shared between systems.

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