



ORAL HEALTH NEWS BULLETIN

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

By OHCO Executive Director Christy Dodd



As most of you are aware, health insurance policy is undergoing a dramatic change. Within the next week, the Senate is expected to vote on their version of the American Health Care Act (AHCA). This bill would have horrific affects on Medicaid across the country, including here in Colorado. According to a [recent issue brief](#) by the Colorado Health Institute, 600,000 Coloradans are expected to lose coverage by 2030. Across the country, approximately 23 million people will lose insurance in the same time period. What does this mean for oral health?

Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), many Coloradans in underserved communities have gained access to oral health care, some for the first time. We have made great strides. For example, as many children and adults now receive coverage under the mandated pediatric dental benefit included in plans sold on Connect for Health Colorado's statewide exchange, Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+), and Medicaid, with the inclusion of the adult dental coverage under Medicaid. Essential health benefits included as part of the ACA ensure that "pediatric services including oral and vision care" are now included in private insurance plans. This progress is being threatened.

Medicaid and CHP + programs provide comprehensive preventive and restorative care to children, helping keep children healthy, pain free and ready to learn. Recently released Child Health Survey data from the state health department found that almost 12,000 children ages 6 to 14 enrolled in Medicaid missed at least one day of school due to tooth pain in the last year. This can lead to lifelong disparities in education and achievement. Additionally, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, last year Colorado was one of only fifteen states providing adults on Medicaid extensive dental benefits.

The AHCA includes a proposal to turn Medicaid reimbursements into a “block grant” for each state, limiting the amount of funding states will receive for each Medicaid recipient. If Colorado receives less funding overall, or has the option to cut some essential health benefits, the progress we have made on oral health will be lost. More low income Coloradans will have to pay out of pocket for oral health services or risk suffering from not only preventable oral pain but also risk having Here are some key reasons to work to protect the strides that have been made around oral health: (taken from Families USA) <http://familiesusa.org/product/why-states-should-offer-extensive-oral-health-benefits-adults-covered-medicaid>

- Untreated oral health conditions can cause other diseases, and even death
- The mouth is the gateway to the body and is often one of the first indicators of health
- Oral health care helps people save their teeth and continue to eat well as they get older
- Poor oral health makes it hard to find employment

What action can you take?

- **Call [Senator Cory Gardner](#)** and tell him to protect our care: Denver: (303) 391-5777, or DC: (202) 224-5941
- **Amplify your opposition** via social media using the hash tags #ProtectOurCare, #KeepKidsCovered, #SaveMyCare, #Medicaid, or #ProtectMedicaid. **[Use this tool](#)** from the Public Health Institute to share messages on Twitter and Facebook.

Oral Health Colorado is committed to protecting access to affordable comprehensive medical coverage that is inclusive of oral health. If you have any questions, please contact Christy Dodd at 970-324-1635.