



Oral Health in the New Health Care Reality

Americans are over 2.5 times more likely to lack dental coverage as they are to lack medical coverage. Millions of Americans currently access dental care through the Affordable Care Act (ACA), Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The president-elect and majority leaders in Congress are discussing options for repealing and replacing the ACA, as well as making changes to the Medicaid and CHIP programs. It is important to understand how these changes will affect access to oral health care and what opportunities exist to preserve access to dental care.

Challenges to Oral Health

Since the passage of the **ACA**, millions of Americans, particularly those in underserved communities, have been able to gain new access to oral health care. The ACA enabled this growth in dental coverage in a number of ways and its repeal threatens to reverse these expansions to oral health care by:

- Dismantling the [23 oral health provisions](#) in the ACA payment, delivery and workforce issues;
- Eliminating health and dental coverage to [22 million](#) people or shifting costs back to families both inside and outside the Marketplaces; and
- Rolling back expansions to health and dental care, resulting in one less mechanism for dental coverage for a population that has seen huge disparities in dental disease.

Medicaid offers health coverage to [73 million](#) of the most vulnerable members of our society including children, older adults and people with disabilities. Currently, Medicaid offers [full dental benefits](#) to children, with dental benefits for adults varying from state to state.

- Over the long term, [block grants and/or per-capita caps](#) to Medicaid will mean fewer dollars going to the states for those programs. Oral health is often one of the first programs to be cut in tough financial times.

The **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)** runs out of federal funding at the end of September 2017. CHIP provides affordable, comprehensive health and dental coverage to more

than 8 million children and hundreds of thousands of pregnant women. It has played a significant role in closing the dental coverage gap in recent years.

- If CHIP is not funded past September 2017, more than 8 million children and pregnant women will lose their health and dental coverage
- Cuts in Medicaid and CHIP will increase disparities. Between 2000 and 2014 the number of children in the US receiving dental care [significantly increased](#) and coverage disparities in race/ethnicity and income steeply declined.

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