

# Minnesota Leads the Nation in Dental Health Disparities

## Medicaid Dental Providers Have the Answers



Mission of Mercy, Moorhead, 2016

Apple Tree Dental  
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# Minnesota's Healthcare Leadership

Minnesota is singularly recognized in the nation for its excellence in health care, due to the state's creative and effective health policy and governance. Recent examples include Health Care Homes and Integrated Health Partnerships, concepts which have transformed health care from what was a purely medical model into a series of linkages among primary care, wellness, prevention, and community resources. The Minnesota Department of Health, Department of Human Services, and the Legislature have supported these efforts.

In 2001, bipartisan legislation created the Minnesota Critical Access Dental (CAD) Program. For 20 years CAD has been targeting higher Medicaid reimbursements to clinics based on the volume of Minnesotans served by state public programs who need dental care. In other words, CAD has directly prevented pain and costly disease for hundreds of thousands of low income and underserved Minnesotans. Since CAD was established, the dental workforce has only marginally increased; meanwhile Minnesotans in public programs have soared from 543,174 in 2001 to 1.5 million in 2018. Recently, the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health urgently called for new actions to not only sustain but to grow access to dental care. This was a recognition that the financial stability of the current network of dental safety net clinics is severely strained.

Lack of access still plagues many of our fellow Minnesotans, so while great strides have been made, more work needs to be done. Comparable to our state's achievement with Health Care Homes, there is a critical opportunity for Minnesota to lead the nation in the concept of Dental Homes.

This can be accomplished by investing in patient-centered dental care with outcomes focused on equity, utilization and quality. The Minnesota Department of Human Services' Dental Services Advisory Committee has recommended a new framework to improve the oral health for Minnesotans enrolled in public programs. While this opens the door, Medicaid providers are poised to participate in this process to ensure coordinated and equitable oral health policy for all Minnesotans.

## MN Public Program Dental Providers

The Minnesota Dental Home Collaborative is a group of safety net dental providers and private practices throughout Minnesota, providing dental care to low income people who are enrolled in Minnesota Health Care Plans. Made up of some of the most vulnerable, marginalized and at-risk Minnesotans, these families struggle to find the dental care they need. Only about 40% of people on these plans are even able to get one dental visit per year. The diverse dental providers in our collaborative, both large and small, private and non-profit, share a commitment to patient-centered innovations, and interconnectedness create a tapestry of oral health care that has served a large proportion of Minnesotans on public programs.

We leverage community partnerships to address barriers to care including transportation, translation, legal, insurance enrollment. Our successes and innovations have garnered state and national awards. We are closing health equity gaps and increasing dental access with exemplary care. Minnesota Dental Homes offers the solutions for health system transformation.

The Minnesota Critical Access Dental (CAD) program has expanded access as public program enrollment has more than doubled. Unfortunately, increasing operating costs, coupled with stagnant and inadequate reimbursement rates, cause a constant struggle for CAD providers to remain in

business. Non-CAD providers also struggle to provide comprehensive care to the Medicaid populations due to inadequate reimbursements.

## Call to Action

The Minnesota Dental Homes Collaborative pledges to work tirelessly with the Departments of Health and of Human Services, and with the Minnesota Legislature to meet the basic needs of Minnesotans. We stand ready to share our experiences and knowledge in this area, as the "boots on the ground," and to work with state agencies, legislators and other key stakeholders. We ask the legislature to:

1. Establish a joint DHS/MDH supported "Minnesota Dental Home Architects Workgroup" that will design Minnesota Dental Homes with participation by current CAD providers, and Medicaid providers, the Minnesota Dental Association, and health plans. Legislative recommendations produced by this group will guide implementation of the Dental Services Advisory Committee's delivery system and workforce recommendations.
2. Invest in Minnesota Dental Home Demonstration Projects by creating a grant program that will award grants that test key dental home innovations and demonstrate success. Successful projects will demonstrate how to meet the needs of underserved populations across Minnesota.
3. While the workgroup is underway, we ask Minnesota's legislature to take the following essential steps forward: (a) update dental base rates to align with 2018 submitted charges (b) sustain CAD reimbursements while the work group and projects are underway (c) reinstate coverage for periodontal care, (d) develop streamlined, transparent, and equitable payment and administrative processes, and (e) create opportunities to expand the dental assistant and dental hygiene workforce.

Our coalition has been working for more than a year, and is ready to work with the Minnesota

legislature now and in the years ahead. We pledge to help build public/private partnerships to increase access to oral health services, so every community and every Minnesotan has a dental home.

## Summary

Minnesota's government is committed to its citizens' needs and their desire for dignity, and ability to achieve their highest potential, yet our citizens face some of the country's greatest oral health disparities. Fortunately, Minnesota is also home to innovative dental professionals who strive to meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. The time is now to end these disparities by creating dental homes that serve every Minnesotan.

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