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IMPROVED ACCESS TO PREVENTIVE CARE
COULD LOWER HOSPITAL COSTS FOR CHRONIC DENTAL CONDITIONS

(COLUMBIA, MD – February 7, 2018) – Improved access to preventive oral health care through the addition of an adult dental benefit in Medicaid could vastly improve the oral health – and overall health – of the many Maryland adults who face serious financial obstacles to obtaining dental care.

Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Dental Coverage for Adults (SB 284), a bill introduced by Sen. Thomas "Mac" Middleton, would require Medicaid to provide a basic adult dental benefit. The bill would help Marylanders who might have otherwise relied on the emergency room for treatment of chronic oral health conditions establish a dental home and obtain preventive oral health care.
The need for adult dental coverage in Medicaid is great. Although dental professionals statewide strive to help at-need patients through programs that offer low-cost care, or through non-profits that offer free services, it is not enough. The struggle to obtain needed dental care puts many of our most vulnerable citizens at risk of untreated pain and serious health issues.
Mary Backley, executive director of the Maryland Dental Action Coalition, said, "The single most important step to improving the oral health – and overall health – of Marylanders is a Medicaid program that covers dental services for adults. Maryland has become a model for the nation in improving the oral health of children. Now we need to do the same for adults." In 34 states, adults who qualify for Medicaid get dental coverage. Maryland is one of just 16 states that does not have adult dental coverage in its Medicaid program.

Through the Maryland General Assembly's unanimous support of Senate Bill 169, the Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) studied the cost of emergency room visits by adults with chronic dental conditions. In fiscal year 2016, Maryland adults made 42,327 emergency department visits for chronic dental conditions, with an average charge of $537 per visit, or a total charge of $22.7 million. Medicaid paid for 53% of those visits, even though Medicaid participants only account for 15% of the adult population in Maryland.   This discrepancy is likely the result of the lack of consistent adult dental coverage in the Medicaid program.

About MDAC: The Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC), the state's leading non-governmental oral health policy and advocacy organization, works to improve the oral health of all Marylanders through increased oral health promotion, disease prevention, education, advocacy and access to oral health care. MDAC leads the development of the five-year Maryland Oral Health Plan and partners with individuals and organizations working to develop and implement initiatives to enhance oral health for all Marylanders.

Optimal Oral Health for All Marylanders