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December 2025

Innovation, Advocacy, Action: Shaping Maryland's Oral Health Future

Recap: MDAC 2025 Oral Health Summit

The Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) held its biennial Oral Health Summit on November 17, 2025, at Turf Valley Resort in Ellicott City. The event had 150 attendees, representing a wide range of oral health professionals, advocates, community leaders, and policymakers. Throughout the day, participants engaged in vibrant, thoughtful, and often challenging conversations around Maryland's oral health landscape, including Medicaid access, school-based oral health programs, workforce shortages, community health workers, and recent national challenges to community water fluoridation.



In her opening remarks, Mary Backley, MDAC's CEO, reminded stakeholders of the remarkable progress in Maryland over the past several years to address the relationship between oral health and systemic health, expand dental coverage to broader communities, and integrate oral health care into primary health care. This was substantiated by Deputy Secretary for Public Health Services Meg Sullivan, MD, MPH, Maryland Department of Health, in her keynote address, citing as an example results to date of the Medicaid adult dental expansion program – over 330,000 Maryland adults, or approximately 41% of the Maryland Medicaid adult community, having receiving dental care since the launch of the dental expansion program less than three years ago. While acknowledging challenges in today's charged environment, Mary Backley noted that the coalition has often turned

demanding situations into opportunity and has counted on the participation and resources of its statewide network to build on accomplishments to achieve greater results. She emphasized that positivity, collaboration, and respect for community have always been key and continue to be essential ingredients to collective efforts and success.

Across the plenaries and breakout sessions, clear action steps emerged, particularly around protecting Medicaid dental coverage, strengthening the dental hygiene workforce, expanding school-based oral health services, and elevating community health workers as key partners in prevention and care coordination. These themes—and recommended actions that surfaced during exchanges in each session—will help guide MDAC’s work in 2026.

A key part of the Summit was the presentation of the inaugural Senator Benjamin L. Cardin Oral Health Advocacy Lifetime Achievement Award. Four oral health champions in the Maryland General Assembly—Senator Malcolm Augustine, Senator Mike McKay, Delegate Heather Bagnall, and Delegate Bonnie Cullison—joined us to offer individual remarks and present the award to Senator Cardin. Their participation reinforced the importance of continued state-level leadership in advancing oral health. Senator Cardin provided remarks, and the Award Ceremony was an emotional and uplifting event.

MDAC engaged 30 speakers for the one-day event, a stellar group of dedicated professionals with exceptional backgrounds, experience, and expertise. These new partnerships will help with future endeavors and collaborations.

A post-program evaluation was distributed to the participants the day after the Summit, and comments reflected both the value of the content and the quality of the event. One participant shared, *“I really appreciated this was a valuable opportunity for oral health professionals to share opinions and expertise.”*



MDAC Launches Public Review Period for Maryland Oral Health Plan, 2026-2030

Provide your input and share the opportunity with others.

The Maryland Oral Health Plan (MOHP) is our state’s roadmap for improving oral health, advancing health equity, and guiding coordinated efforts across Maryland’s oral health



We need your input!

community. Developed by the Maryland Dental Action Coalition with partners across the state, the MOHP outlines key goals and strategies to ensure every Marylander can access affordable, high-quality oral health care. The plan focuses on three core priorities: Access to Care, Oral Disease and Injury Prevention and Oral Health Literacy and Education.

The 2026–2030 MOHP is Maryland's third statewide oral health plan, following the 2011 and 2018 versions. Each plan builds upon the previous one, addressing emerging challenges and leveraging opportunities to strengthen oral health for all.

We want your input! The draft MOHP is now open for public review, and we invite Maryland's oral health professionals, partners, and community members to share feedback. Your insights will help ensure the final plan is comprehensive, community-informed, and actionable.

Please review the draft and help spread the word across your networks!

[Review the draft Maryland Oral Health Plan](#)

A Case Study: Maryland's Path to Comprehensive Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage

CareQuest Institute for Oral Health documents efforts to secure coverage in five states

On December 3rd, CareQuest Institute for Oral Health released five case studies that explore, in detail, the advocacy and policy journey of five states to strengthen their Medicaid adult dental benefits — from emergencies only to comprehensive benefits — including challenges, strategies, and successes. Featured states include Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Utah, and Virginia. Each case study includes key lessons that advocates can use to strengthen access to oral health care for low-income families, people with disabilities, and residents of rural communities in their own states.

Key insights revealed in all case studies:

- Data-driven talking points about cost savings and workforce productivity resonate across party lines.
- Building diverse coalitions provides credibility and reinforces the connection between oral health and overall well-being.
- Starting with high-need populations, like adults with disabilities, demonstrates feasibility and can help build momentum.
- Provider buy-in is essential to build network capacity.

CareQuest
Institute for Oral Health

Building on Tragedy, Sustained by Strategy
Maryland's Path to Comprehensive Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage

CASE STUDY

Setting the Stage: Background and Context

Prior to 2023, Maryland Medicaid's dental coverage for non-pregnant adults mirrored the restrictive policies found in most states: emergency services only. For vulnerable adults, this often meant enduring preventable pain, infection, and tooth loss — or turning to hospital emergency departments (EDs) for problems that could be treated in a dental office at a fraction of the cost.

Unfortunately, Maryland's path to expanded coverage began with tragedy. In 2007, 12-year-old Deamonte Driver, a boy who had been enrolled in the state's Medicaid program, died from a brain infection that originated from an untreated tooth abscess. His death became a catalyzing moment for dental reform in Maryland, sparking immediate improvements in children's dental coverage and access.

In response, the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (MDH) established the Dental Action Committee (DAC) and charged the committee with making recommendations on increasing access to dental care for underserved children in the state. In 2010, the DAC transitioned into an independent, statewide network, the Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC). MDAC incorporated into a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 2011, dedicated to improving oral health equity and disparities in accessible care for all Marylanders.

Executive Snapshot

Date of Expansion: January 1, 2023 (following pilot program that began spring 2019)

Coverage Before Dental Benefits Expansion: Emergency services only for most adults

Coverage After Dental Benefits Expansion: An expanded set of dental services including diagnostic, preventive, periodontal, and restorative, with no annual dollar cap

Newly Covered Adults: About 800,000 adult Medicaid enrollees

Key Legislative Vehicle: Senate Bill 284 (2018) established Medicaid adult dental pilot program; 2022 budget appropriation for comprehensive adult dental expansion in the Maryland Medical Assistance program under HB5/SB550.

High-Level Takeaway: Advocates can transform tragedy into lasting policy change through incremental implementation, bipartisan coalition-building, strategic use of data, and persistent focus. Incremental steps to advance the integration of oral health into state programs are key to success.

Why This Story Matters: Maryland's experience shows how states can leverage unique health-care delivery models, budget opportunities, and diverse coalitions to expand adult dental coverage — even when it requires sustained advocacy over nearly two decades.

What is the Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage Checker?

The Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage Checker is an interactive tool for policymakers, administrators, and advocates to better understand where a given state's Medicaid adult dental benefits package falls on a continuum from no benefits to extensive benefits, helping identify areas for improvement.

Using data from an annual survey of state Medicaid agencies, the Coverage Checker looks at coverage of specific procedures and services, including allowed frequency, in-network providers, and other service categories. Points are assigned based on coverage provided in each category.

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Rural Health Transformation Program

Maryland Department of Health submits proposal



House Resolution 1, enacted into law on July 4, 2025, created a \$50 billion fund, called the Rural Health Transformation Program, to offset losses that rural health providers will experience associated with health provisions in the legislation. The \$50 billion will be distributed to all states between fiscal years (FYs) 2026 – 2030, with \$10 billion distributed each fiscal year. Half of the \$50 billion will be allocated equally among all states. The other 50% of funds will be distributed to states with an approved application in an amount

determined by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator and will be based on a variety of factors, including rural population, the proportion of rural health facilities in the State, the situation of certain hospitals in the State, and other factors to be specified by CMS. On September 15, CMS announced a Notice of Funding Opportunity on how states can apply to receive funding from the Rural Health Transformation Fund (RHTF).

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) submitted the state's proposal to CMS by the posted deadline. The Maryland proposal reflects significant feedback from rural Marylanders and State partners, provided through community listening sessions and the open request for information. To ensure that dental health was included in the Maryland proposal to CMS, MDAC submitted approaches and ideas to augment accessibility to dental care. Rural communities have significantly limited access to oral health care and as a result, experience significantly lower utilization rates, and poorer health outcomes in comparison with urban communities.

CMS must approve or deny all applications by December 31, 2025. Please be sure to check the MDAC website for updates on the MDH application.

[View the Summary of the Maryland Proposal](#)

CMS Addresses Medical-Dental Integration in Medicare Physician Fee Schedule

Physicians are incentivized to take oral health training, refer to dentists

CMS released its final rule for the 2026 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule in October, announcing policy updates that take effect Jan. 1, 2026. Included is a new oral health–related quality improvement activity within the merit-based incentive payment system, a program primarily for Medicare-participating physicians.

The merit-based incentive payment system is a Medicare program that adjusts reimbursement for participating physicians based on quality, cost, improvement activities and use of electronic health records. Under the 2026 rule, CMS introduced three new improvement activities, one of which focuses specifically on oral health. To qualify,

Medicare-participating physicians must complete training through [Smiles for Life](#), a free online curriculum that includes “The Oral Examination” course and implement a referral process, contact local dental providers and assess their capacity.

In addition, physicians must take at least one step to integrate oral health into their practice, such as creating a dental referral network, adding oral health questions to patient intake forms, performing intraoral screenings or referring patients without a dental home. Physicians may also meet the activity requirements by counseling patients on the link between oral health and systemic conditions or by documenting oral health findings in referral notes.

MDAC joins national and state organizations in recognizing the significance of this important development. Maryland has made incremental progress in integrating oral health care and medical care by increasing the number of primary care providers offering risk assessments, oral health screenings and other prevention services, such as fluoride varnish applications. The new rule in the CMS 2026 Medicare Physician Fee schedule is a recognition of the critical role, and direct relationship, of oral health to overall health. The new CMS rule provides a great opportunity to expand state efforts to educate dental and medical care clinicians and integrate oral health into medical care settings, as addressed in the current and updated Maryland Oral Health Plan.

The 2026 rule made no changes to the current payment of limited dental services which are inextricably tied to the clinical success of qualifying medical procedures. The payment of dental services in limited circumstances was first introduced in Medicare Part B in 2023 where CMS codified policies in which Medicare Parts A and B pay for dental services when that service is integral to treating a beneficiary's medical condition and specific circumstances, such as to eliminate infection preceding an organ transplant and certain cardiac procedures and prior to treatment for head and neck cancers (beginning CY 2024).

*The following article was submitted by the
Maryland Department of Health Office of
Oral Health.*



Gregory B. McClure, D.M.D., M.P.H. Oral Health Community Hero Award

Gregory B. McClure, D.M.D., M.P.H. Oral Health Community Hero Award is given each year to recognize an individual with outstanding contributions in improving the oral health of Marylanders. Dr. McClure worked for the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources in Harrisburg before pursuing a degree in dentistry from Temple University. Dr. McClure practiced dentistry in Binghamton, N.Y., until 1999, when after obtaining MBA and MPH degrees from Cornell and the University of Albany, he decided to serve the public's health needs as the Dental Director of the State of Delaware. After retiring from his position with Delaware in 2016, he returned to service as the Dental Director for the Maryland Department of Health's Office of Oral Health and as the President of the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors. Dr. McClure was passionate about his work in improving the oral health of the public - especially for disadvantaged and lower-income families.

Past recipients of the Gregory B. McClure, D.M.D., M.P.H. Oral Health Community Hero Award include: Dr. Harold Goodman (2018), Dr. George Acs (2019), Dr. Patricia Bell-McDuffie (2020), Dr. Gretchen Seibert (2021), Dr. Alice Horowitz and Dr. Dushanka

Kleinman (2022), Charles Doring, D.D.S., M.A.G.D (2023) and Celeste M. Camerino, DDS (2024).

The 2025 Gregory B. McClure, D.M.D., M.P.H. Oral Health Community Hero Award recipient is Diane D. Romaine, DMD, MScM, MAGD. Award recipients are honored at the Annual Ava Roberts Oral Health Symposium.

Congratulations to all recipients and thank you to every practitioner for the work you do every day in your community!



"As of 2024, approximately 57 million Americans live in a dental health professional shortage area and about 67% of those shortage areas are in rural communities."

"Health Workforce Shortage Areas: Explore HPSAs." [Health Resources & Services Administration](#). Accessed January 18, 2024.

NEWS & RESOURCES

Access/Coverage

[Take action on rural oral health, ADA urges](#)

[Dental Care in Crisis](#)

[Implementing Community-Driven Strategies to Transform Oral Healthcare Access](#)

[Maryland Oral Health Resource Guide](#)

Children's Oral Health

[CareQuest Institute Reacts to New FDA Action on Children's Fluoride Supplements and Urges Continued Focus on Prevention and Access](#)

[Optimal Management of Tooth Decay in Children](#)

RESOURCE: Provider Enrollment Flyer

To learn how Maryland dental providers can enroll in the Maryland Healthy Smiles Dental Program and resources provided, [review this enrollment flyer](#) and share with others!

RESOURCE: Maryland Oral Health Plan

[Maryland's Children at Risk: Findings from Survey Shows High Prevalence of Tooth Decay](#)

Chronic Disease

[Diabetes and Dental Health: A Call for Greater Medical and Dental Integration](#)

Community Health Workers

[The Role of Community Health Workers in Pediatrics](#)

Fluoride

[Fluoride Facts, 2025 E-Book](#)

[Community Water Fluoridation: Changing Perceptions for the Public Good](#)

[Community Water Fluoridation: Proven, Safe, and Essential for Oral Health](#)

General

[Preventive dental visits strong as at-home oral health care softens](#)

Health Insurance

[Maryland Health Connection](#)

Maternal and Child Health

[2025 March of Dimes Report Card: United States](#)

[2025 March of Dimes Report Card: Maryland](#)

Medicaid

[Dental Care in Medicaid Programs](#)

Medicare

[Calendar Year \(CY\) 2026 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Final Rule](#)

Maryland Oral Health Plan

2018 - 2023



*Framework to Improve
the Oral Health of All
Marylanders*

**Maryland Dental
Action Coalition**

The Maryland Oral Health Plan outlines 11 oral health goals in three key areas: access to oral health care, oral disease and injury prevention, and oral health literacy and education.

**DOWNLOAD THE
PLAN**

The Maryland Oral Health Plan is financially supported by the Maryland Department of Health.

Legislative Contacts

[U.S. Senators \(MD\)](#)

[U.S. Representatives \(MD\)](#)

[Maryland State Legislators](#)

Meetings/ Events/ Webinars

[Families USA Health Action
Conference 2026
January 22-23, 2026
Capital Hilton Hotel
Washington, DC](#)

Oral Health Integration

[From Silos to Synergy: Integrating Oral Health into Whole-Person Care Through Interprofessional Practice](#)

Rural Health

[MD Rural Health Strategic Plan 2025-2030](#)

Workforce

[How New Interactive Licensure Maps are Helping Dental Hygiene Careers](#)

[Dental Education Faces a Perfect Storm](#)

[National Association of Community Health Centers
Policy & Issues Forum
February 9-12, 2026
Gaylord National Harbor
Washington, DC](#)

[American Dental Education Association Annual Session & Exhibition
Bridging Pathways Advancing Access
March 21-24, 2026
Montreal, Canada](#)

[National Oral Health Conference
Unveiling Oral Health Possibilities
April 13-15, 2026
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma](#)

[Academy Health 2026 Research Meeting
May 30-June 2, 2026
Seattle Convention Center
Seattle, WA](#)

[National Academy for State Health Policy
September 28-30, 2026
New York Hilton Midtown
New York, NY](#)

[National Network for Oral Health Access Conference
October 25-28, 2026
Seattle, WA](#)



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Do you have events or announcements you'd like to share? Contact MDAC, and we'll make every effort to include them in our next newsletter, as space permits.

Contact MDAC

MDAC is statewide coalition of clinical care providers, governments, non-profits, academic institutions, managed care organizations, foundations and associations working collaboratively to improve the health of all Marylanders through increased oral health promotion, disease prevention, education, advocacy and access to oral health care.

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