



April 2026

2026 Maryland General Assembly Session

Gains made to protect and improve oral health care access in the state

The Maryland General Assembly finished the 2026 legislation session on April 13th with the bells ringing on the floors of the Senate and House of Delegates at precisely midnight. The 90-day session was a marathon of policy, budget, and political debate more intense than usual because of the national climate. Despite the constant churn, the Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) remained laser-focused on the oral health needs of Marylanders. The result was meaningful legislative wins to protect and advance dental access in Maryland.

The legislative session opened with the news that Maryland was facing a \$1.5 billion structural deficit which raised concerns about reductions in the Medicaid budget, including the dental coverage program. However, Governor Moore's administration and the Maryland General Assembly did not consider any cuts to the Medicaid dental program which reflects the years of steadfast advocacy from MDAC and the oral health advocacy community. When the Maryland General Assembly finalized the budget, funding for Medicaid remained intact.



MDAC continued its focus on ensuring there is a sufficient network of dental providers in both Medicaid and commercial insurance plans. MDAC partnered with the Maryland Community Health System, a network of federally qualified health centers, to secure passage of *House Bill 1093/Senate Bill 808 – Health Insurance – Provider Panel Requirements (Delegate Bonnie Cullison and Senator Nancy King)*. The legislation will produce the most significant reform of the insurance credentialing process in over 20 years. Federally qualified health centers and private practices sometimes wait for almost half-a-year to be able place a new provider on an insurance plan. Under the new law, this waiting time will be cut in half. Thus, providers joining a practice will be able to see patients much more quickly and be reimbursed. House Bill 1093/Senate Bill 808 will have a meaningful impact on reducing wait times and addressing provider gaps.

While many of the bills introduced focused on navigating the fiscal climate, Delegate Bonnie Cullison introduced one of the most forward-thinking bills, *House Bill 1357 - Commission on Re-Imagining Health Care in Maryland*. The bill will support Maryland in reforming our healthcare system to be truly consumer-focused in the years and even decades ahead. MDAC worked with Delegate Cullison to ensure that the Commission on Re-Imagining Health Care would continue to advance the integration of oral health into our healthcare system.

Delegate Bonnie Cullison's Departure from the Maryland General Assembly

At the beginning of the 2026 session, oral health champion Delegate Bonnie Cullison (D-Montgomery County) announced that she will not seek reelection this fall for a fifth term in the House of Delegates. Delegate Cullison, elected in 2010, spent her legislative career on the Health and Government Operations Committee, which Speaker Pena-Melnyk this year split into a new Health Committee and a Government, Labor, and Elections Committee. Cullison served as the vice chair of the Health Committee during the 2026 session.

Over the past 15 years, Delegate Cullison has championed passage of major health-related legislation, including as co-sponsor of Maryland Medical Assistance – Dental Coverage for Adults, establishment of the Prescription Drug Affordability Board, an expansion of school-based health clinics and, as co-sponsor, the Trans Health Equity Act. In 2023, MDAC recognized Delegate Cullison's enormous contribution and steadfast resolve to address health disparities across Maryland with the MDAC Oral Health Legislative Champion Award. This award recognized Delegate Cullison and her colleagues in the Maryland General Assembly who worked collectively to cosponsor legislation that established comprehensive dental coverage for nearly 800,000 Maryland adults. Since the launch of the program, hundreds of thousands of Maryland adults have received dental care, many for the first time in years. Delegate Cullison, in partnership with Senator Malcolm Augustine (D-Prince George's County) - presented MDAC with citations from the Maryland General Assembly – one from each chamber – recognizing MDAC's tireless efforts and commitment to ensure that every Marylander has access to dental care including working for the success of Medicaid Dental Coverage for Adults.

Delegate Cullison's unabating compassion and dedication to the health and wellbeing of all will be deeply missed in the Maryland General Assembly. MDAC is forever grateful to Delegate Cullison for her decades of extraordinary work that has changed the lives of countless Marylanders for the better.

MDAC Presents at State and National Programs

Conference sessions and statewide webinar highlight MDAC's work

National Oral Health Conference

Sponsored by Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD), and the American Association of Public Health Dentistry (AAPHD), the National Oral Health Conference is an annual event focused on dental public health. During the April 12-15, 2026, conference in Oklahoma City, MDAC formally presented in a session, titled *Elevating Voices, Driving Change, Building National Impact*.

Amid shrinking resources and growing health disparities, state-level advocacy has never been more important as a driver of community-informed oral health policy change. In addition to MDAC, other participants included CareQuest Institute for Oral Health, North Carolina Oral Health Collaborative, and American Network of Oral Health Coalitions.

CareQuest Institute for Oral Health and American Network of Oral Health Coalitions are partnering to strengthen the capacity of state oral health coalitions to advocate for policies that expand access to care, address workforce challenges, and improve outcomes for underserved populations. During this session, panelists highlighted strategies designed to elevate state voices, ensure coalitions have tools and resources they need, and connect local advocacy to broader national efforts. MDAC shared its blueprint for state-level policy successes over the past decade, identified challenges faced, and discussed how a united advocacy approach grounded in participation of a broad, diverse network can influence and achieve lasting change through policy. The goal was for participants to understand why state-level advocacy is essential in today's environment and how collective action is needed, developed, and implemented.

Roundtable: MDAC Story Collection Project

As part of MDAC's work to document the critical importance of comprehensive Medicaid dental coverage, specifically for the Maryland adult community, MDAC worked with Fellows from the National Institute of Dental and Cranial and Research (NIDCR) to develop a toolkit of strategies to collect and analyze stories that impact of dental care has had on adults receiving care through the Maryland Healthy Smiles Dental Program since January 2023. Medicaid utilization data tells an important story, but MDAC recognizes that qualitative data and stories of impact will provide necessary information that documents and underscores the importance of dental care and expansion in coverage. The two Fellows, Rund Al Rusan and Ridhima Luthra from the NIDCR, hosted a roundtable discussion of the project, development of the tool, and preliminary results from interviews conducted after a soft launch of the program in late March. MDAC is excited to expand the soft launch of the Story Collection Project and hopes to engage partners throughout the state to assist with these efforts. [Learn more about the project here.](#)

Maryland Assembly on School Based Health Care (MASBHC)

Data from the 2022/2023 Oral Health Survey of Maryland School Children reveals a troubling rise in untreated dental decay, with 21% of students affected, up from 14% in the previous survey in 2015/2016. Alarming, 30% of students in the recent survey required early follow-up or urgent care due to pain or infection. On March 26, MASBHC hosted a webinar, *Improving Children's Oral Health Through School Based Programs: Future Opportunities and Lessons Learned*, that explored the critical role that school-based oral health initiatives can play in addressing these health issues. In addition to MDAC, representatives from Howard County Health Department and Choptank Community Health Systems shared what is currently happening in schools, discussed effective strategies to improve student oral health, and offered ways registrants can support stronger, more accessible oral health programs in school settings. A recording of the online seminar, and webinar slides, is available on the [MASBHC website.](#)

June 2 - Advancing Veteran Oral Health in Maryland

Webinar designed to identify gaps and potential solutions



The Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) and the American Institute on Disparities in Public Health (AIDPH) are collaborating on an educational opportunity to call attention to and advance veteran oral health in Maryland. On Tuesday, June 2, from 11-12pm, MDAC and AIDPH will cosponsor a one-hour interactive webinar session that will feature the [Maryland veteran oral health state profile](#) along

with tools, resources, data, and advocacy frameworks for improving access and outcomes for veterans' oral health.

Webinar content will address the unique challenges and opportunities that define veteran oral health in Maryland. Facilitated discussion will address ways to use information in clinical, research, and decision-making tailored to the needs of Maryland veterans. There will also be opportunities for sharing insights, and identifying knowledge gaps, policy shortcomings, data deficiencies, and advocacy needs specific to Maryland.

Learning Objectives include:

- Analyze Maryland-specific veteran oral health data to identify key disparities and challenges, using critical thinking skills to inform advocacy efforts.
- Evaluate existing policies and advocate for reforms to bridge gaps in veteran oral healthcare access, employing a strategic approach to policy change.

- Collaborate with local stakeholders to develop data-driven oral health advocacy and education plans, fostering teamwork and network building.
- Formulate evidence-based strategies for utilizing the knowledge gained in the session to advance veteran oral health in Maryland.

Participants will receive 1 free continuing education credit.

[Register for the webinar.](#)

U.S. Senate Bill Aims to Strengthen Dental Public Health

Legislation would extend funding for CDC's Oral Health program



On March 5, 2026, U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced the Promoting Dental Health Act to reauthorize funding the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Oral Health program for the next five years. The CDC's Oral Health program has received annual funding for a range of public health activities to promote oral health, that includes funding to 15 states – including Maryland – that supports critical programs to prevent cavities, gum disease, and other painful and serious conditions through dental education, data collection, school-based sealant care for low-income children, workforce development, and research into gaps in patient care.

The Promoting Dental Public Health Act is one part of Durbin's comprehensive initiative to bolster access to comprehensive health care in rural communities and to address the nationwide shortage of dental and health care professionals. For instance, Senator Durbin authored a provision in the American Rescue Plan to invest \$1 billion into the National Health Service Corps (NHSC), which funds scholarships and loan repayment for new doctors, nurses, dentists, and behavioral health clinicians who commit to serve in rural and urban areas of need. The [NHSC program](#) helps build the pipeline of new providers and surge them to shortage areas.

The Promoting Dental Health Act has earned endorsements from the American Dental Association; American Academy of Pediatrics; American Academy of Pediatric Dentists, and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

How Can Medicaid Integrate Community Health Workers in Children's Health Care?

Community health workers (CHWs) can help bridge gaps in care by meeting children where they are — at home and in communities. CHWs are linked to better well-child care, improved identification of social needs, and fewer emergency department visits.

Medicaid, which covers nearly half of U.S. children, can play a vital role in expanding this evidence-based workforce by supporting CHW integration into pediatric care teams. This infographic illustrates current challenges in pediatric care, how CHWs can help close gaps in care, and opportunities for Medicaid and its partners to advance CHW integration.

[Check out the infographic!](#)

The Maryland Dent-Care Loan Assistance Repayment Program is Now Accepting Applications for Full-time and Part-time Dentists and Dental Hygienists

The Maryland Dent Care Loan Assistance Repayment Program (MDC-LARP) helps **dentists and dental hygienists** pay off their student loans. The purpose of MDC-LARP is to increase access to oral health care services for Maryland Medical Assistance Program (MMAP) recipients by increasing the number of dentists and dental hygienists treating this population.

The 2024 Maryland General Assembly adopted HB 265/Senate Bill 456 to include part-time Dentists and Dental Hygienists. The number of recipients per award is to be determined based on available funding.

Applicant eligibility requirements for the Maryland Dent-Care Loan Assistance Program are:

- Be a licensed dentist or dental hygienist in the state of Maryland
- Have an outstanding higher education loan debt
- Be able to serve three years (dentists)/two years (dental hygienists) in a full-time (40 hours) or part time (20-39 hours) eligible dental practice site(s).
- Treat a minimum of 30% MMAP recipients as a portion of the total patient population.
- Be enrolled with MMAP's Maryland Healthy Smiles Dental Program. (Dental hygienists to be supervised by a Medical Assistance provider)
- Able to keep record of all patients treated (MMAP and non-MMAP) and provide monthly written reports to the Maryland Department of Health, Office of Oral Health.
- Comply with Maryland State Board of Dental Examiners and [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Infection Control](#) protocols (See [checklist](#)).

Award Amounts for Full-time and Part-time Providers

\$50,000 for Dentists: 3-year commitment, full-time, 40 hours
\$25,000 for Dentists: 3-year commitment, part-time, 20-39 hours
\$10,000 for Dental Hygienists: 2-year commitment, 40 hours
\$5,000 for Dental Hygienists: 2-year commitment, 20-39 hours

Application materials, along with additional information about the program, can be found on the Office of Oral Health's [website](#). Deadline to apply is July 31, 2026.

Questions? Contact Stacy Costello, MPH, CHES, MDC LARP Program Manager, mdh.mdclarpprogram@maryland.gov

Share the program flyer with your networks!

"My legislation, the Promoting Dental Health Act, will ensure that the CDC Oral Health program has the resources necessary to serve more Americans and prevent serious dental disease."

NEWS & RESOURCES

Access to Care

[Mind the Gap: Bridging The Oral Health Divide for More Affordable and Accessible Coverage](#)

[Repeated Use of Emergency Departments for Nontraumatic Dental Conditions](#)

Fluoride

[If States Ban Fluoride, More Kids Will Get Cavities and Medicaid Costs Could Soar, Study Finds](#)

[Fluoride Is Cleared By Science But Supply Threads Raise New Concerns](#)

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

Maryland Rural Health Transformation Program

[Maryland Rural Health Transformation Program](#)

[Maryland Rural Health Program Funding Opportunities](#)

[State Agencies, Partners Discuss Potential Impact of Federal Funding on Maryland's Rural Health Care Workforce and Agriculture Industry](#)

[Increasing Access to Oral Health Care in Rural Communities](#)

Medicaid

[Increasing Medicaid Access: Missouri's Collaborative Approach to Engaging Dentists](#)

[Ensuring Continuous Coverage for Pregnant and Postpartum Medicaid Enrollees Under OBBBA](#)

Medical-Dental Integration

[Medical-Dental Integration](#)

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!

Legislative Contacts

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

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

[Maryland State Legislators](#)

Meetings/ Events/ Webinars

[ADHA Integrated Care Summit May 15-17, 2026](#)
[Omni Interlocken Broomfield, CO](#)

[Maryland State Reform Health Policy Conference](#)
[May 21, 2026](#)
[Baltimore Marriott Waterfront](#)

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

[The CHI-Community Health Conference](#)
[August 16-18, 2026](#)
[Aria Resort](#)
[Las Vegas, Nevada](#)

[ADHA Annual Conference, The Heart of Hygiene](#)
[September 26-28, 2026](#)
[Ft. Worth, Texas](#)

[Maintaining Momentum on Medical-Dental Integration](#)

[From Cavities to Chronic Disease: Why Medicine and Dentistry Can't Operate Separately](#)

Medicare

[Early Association of Expanded Medicare Dental Benefits to Dentist Billing in Medicare](#)

[FAQ: Adding a Dental Benefit to Medicare Part B](#)

[2026 National Voices of Medicare Summit](#)

Oral Health - Systemic Health

[Landmark Trial Shows 60% Drop in Hospital-Acquired Pneumonia](#)

[How Nutrition and Inflammation Drive Periodontal and Systemic Disease](#)

[Periodontitis and Cardiovascular Diseases Are the Not-So-Silent Killers](#)

Oral Health Leadership and Education

[New ASTDD Foundation Will Expand Investment in Oral Health Leadership Capacity](#)

Workforce

[Q1 2026 State of the US Dental Economy](#)

[A-dec Donations \\$1 Million to Dental Trade Alliance Foundation](#)

[The Help That Many Older Americans Need Most](#)

[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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CONTACT

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

JOIN

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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