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July 2025

Budget Reconciliation Bill Passed and Signed into Law

Health coverage for thousands in Maryland at risk



On July 4, 2025, President Trump signed H.R. 1, the Budget Reconciliation Bill, into law which includes significant changes to the Medicaid program. According to estimates, this may result in nearly 12 million people losing access to health coverage.

The bill contains deep cuts to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), impacting health care access and food security for thousands of Maryland residents. According to the Center for American Progress, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that the bill will cut federal spending on Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) benefits by over \$1 trillion.

Administrative changes dictate that eligibility for Medicaid will be reviewed and redetermined every six months, doubling the frequency of eligibility determination and requiring completion and provision of necessary documentation by participants prior to review. There is

consensus that errors will occur, and people will lose Medicaid coverage as a result. There will be a new cap of \$200,000 for federal student loan borrowing, creating a barrier for students who want to pursue a career in the dental field. This will undoubtedly have an impact on an already debilitating health care workforce in Maryland and nationwide. According to the American Dental Education Association, the most recently reported educational debt for indebted dental school graduates in the Class of 2024 is \$312,700.

Message from MDAC CEO

The significance these major cuts will have on essential services and care in communities throughout Maryland cannot be overstated. It will create a negative ripple effect on hospitals, community health centers, and other critical social services provided to state residents in every county.

MDAC's strong relationship with its coalition partners has always been its greatest asset and MDAC's success over the past decade in addressing health disparities can be attributed to the strength and continued participation of a growing, diverse network. Formed over 15 years ago by a group of highly engaged oral health influencers from across the state, MDAC partnerships with regional, community, and grassroots organizations is a model that has been emulated in other states to advance common health goals and support health systems change.

Due to the collective work of MDAC's strong network of clinical practitioners, non-profit organizations, associations, social service agencies, managed care organizations, academic research, and educational institutions, among others, the Maryland General Assembly passed legislation during the 2022 session establishing the Maryland Medical Assistance – Dental Coverage for Adults program.

Since its launch in January 2023, the program's value has been clear and measurable. More than 303,000 adults in Maryland —37% of the eligible adult community—have accessed dental care, and over 1,300 dental providers have been reimbursed for dental services through the program. Maryland's utilization exceeds the national average: in 2024 alone, an estimated 24% of Maryland's adult Medicaid participants received dental care, compared to [a national average of just 17%](#). MDAC recognizes and is grateful to the Maryland Department of Health for its partnership and critical role to ensure success of the Medicaid adult dental program.

Since the launch of the adult dental program, MDAC prioritized building awareness of the establishment of Medicaid adult dental coverage among both Marylanders and dental providers. Through social media campaigns, community outreach events statewide, and trusted partnerships, MDAC expanded engagement and helped more Marylanders understand how to access care. Utilization data reflects the effectiveness of Maryland's coverage model and the strength of MDAC's continued education and outreach through its network.

In addition, since the launch of the Maryland Medicaid adult dental program, downward trends in provider participation in the Maryland Medicaid dental program have reversed course. According to Maryland Department of Health, 2023 report on Dental Provider Participation in Maryland Healthy Smiles Dental Program, there was a 6% increase in dental providers participating in the Medicaid program—covering both children and adults—in 2023 compared to a 2.4% decrease in 2022 and a 0.7% decrease in 2021. These trends highlight the growing provider confidence in the program and are key to sustainability.

In these unprecedented times where Medicaid is vulnerable to political and budgetary shifts, MDAC is reaching out to encourage even greater commitment and participation from state, regional, community and grassroots organizations to work collectively to defend and protect the Medicaid adult dental program. In coordination with statewide partners, MDAC will work to demonstrate the program's success, increase adult community participation, expand public awareness, and further build a coordinated, informed network of advocates who will continue to strengthen access to oral health care for Marylanders in need.

Medicaid utilization data tells an important story, but qualitative data and stories of impact will provide tools to further, and better, document and defend the critical importance of expanded adult dental coverage. MDAC is working with fellows from the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research and the MDAC Adult Dental Collaborative to develop strategies to collect stories from Medicaid participants to document how dental coverage has improved their quality of life.

As a reminder, we have worked collectively, and effectively, to secure major oral health achievements in our state before with great, historical success. In 2017, MDAC worked with Chair Mac Middleton to secure passage of Senate Bill 169 - *Health - Cost of Emergency*

Room Visits to Treat Dental Conditions and Coverage of Dental Services Under Medicaid – Study. MDAC partnered with the DentaQuest Institute (now called CareQuest Institute for Oral Health) on conducting the groundbreaking study and in 2018, presented findings from the study to legislative leaders. MDAC and coalition partners, in collaboration with legislative champions Senator Mac Middleton and Delegate Mike McKay, secured passage of Senate Bill 284 – *Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults – Pilot Program*. In 2021, MDAC worked with legislative champions — Delegate Mike McKay, Delegate Bonnie Cullison, Senator Malcolm Augustine, and Senator Guy Guzzone — to determine that the time was right to expand Medicaid adult dental coverage with legislators announcing their intention to introduce a bill during a plenary session at the November 2021 MDAC Oral Health Summit. In managing the advocacy campaign for House Bill 6/Senate Bill 150 - *Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Dental Coverage for Adults*, MDAC coordinated strategy with bill sponsors and a broad grassroots group of stakeholders of over 80 actively engaged organizations. The legislation passed in April 2022 and was signed into law by the Governor. For the first time in over 30 years, comprehensive dental coverage was available to approximately 800,000 adults enrolled in Medicaid in Maryland.

Dental health is health. Collectively we can work to retain and strengthen programs to improve the health and wellbeing of all Marylanders.

School Based Wellness Pediatric Dental Program

Integration of care expands access to dental care to improve student health

The following article was submitted by:

Allysin Houle, Deputy Director, Bureau of Access to Healthcare Services
Ambyr Klink, Program Supervisor of School-Based Wellness Centers
Ilise Marrazzo, Director of Nursing and Bureau Director of Family Health Services
Howard County Health Department

The Howard County Health Department (HCHD) [School Based Wellness Centers \(SBWC\)](#) are located in 10 elementary, middle, and high schools in Howard County Public School System. Nurse Practitioners provide primary care services to students who are enrolled in the program. In 2022, the SBWC nurse practitioners were diagnosing increasing amounts of severe dental decay, but were unable to find a dentist who was able to urgently see students at a discounted rate to provide the necessary care. Staff found that while most students were able to receive general dental services through Chase Brexton, the federally qualified health center in Howard County, students experiencing severe dental issues couldn't easily access pediatric specialty care. Howard County Health Department, Chase Brexton and Kids Dental Center developed a screening and referral program to expedite access to care for priority patients.

In March 2023, the SBWC Pediatric Dental Program was established. This program provides access to dental services for uninsured pediatric patients, including those with special health care needs, who have urgent dental needs. All students who are enrolled in the HCHD SBWC program are able to be screened and referred for urgent dental care. Access to care has resulted in improved overall health, increased confidence, and better learning. Since the program started, 176 children have received comprehensive dental care.

School staff have recognized the difference in children who have received treatment for their urgent dental needs through this partnership. Teachers report that students are eating better, smiling more, and more engaged in learning now that their teeth are no longer causing chronic pain. In addition, the SBWC NP's work to prevent dental disease by providing comprehensive dental education and distributing dental kits that include toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss and information on how to ensure good oral health. Students enrolled in the SBWC program can receive fluoride varnish twice a year with parent

permission. We are grateful to see this program continue and excited to see what we have in store for future years to come.

This program was a recipient of the NACo (National Association of Counties) Award for 2024.



From Family Health Services' School Based Wellness Center Program and Access to Health Care, for their Pediatric Dental Program are (l-r) **Jeanette Donald**, **Allysin Houle** and **Ambyr Klink**.

Community Water Fluoridation, Fluoride Supplements Challenged

Thousands of comments submitted in response to federal preparations to remove fluoride products



On July 23, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), in partnership with the Reagan-Udall Foundation, hosted a public meeting on the "Use of Orally Ingestible Unapproved Prescription Drug Products Containing Fluoride in the Pediatric Population." The FDA recently announced its preparations to remove these products—such as tablets and drops used in young children to prevent tooth decay—from the U.S. market as early as this fall, taking away consumer choice and the ability for caregivers and

providers to determine what's best for a child's oral health. On July 10, MDAC sent an eblast to its network encouraging partners and stakeholders to act and submit a public comment. MDAC submitted formal comments on July 14, and by the published deadline, over 4,600 comments were submitted from individuals and organizations nationwide.

[The hybrid in-person and virtual meeting](#) included various presentations and debate, much of which extended beyond the use of fluoride supplements to include community water fluoridation and general commentary on fluoride use. The topics included scope of use, safety concerns, and impacts of fluoride on the gut microbiome, neurocognitive and

thyroid. Each section included speakers that advocated for the use of fluoride supplements and those who were anti-fluoride. The hearing, which was heated at times, included presentations of misleading information without documentation, something we are observing more frequently. There was consensus among all that more research is needed, although the methods for this research were debated. The meeting concluded with a public comment period, where approximately 20 people provided short public testimony. Many prominent oral health leaders added their strong support of the continued use and availability of fluoride supplements.

Despite the longstanding scientific research showing the benefits and safety of fluoride, it is alarming that the benefits of community water fluoridation and fluoride supplements are being contested, particularly by federal agencies. In April, MDAC joined the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) and 250 of the foremost health professional organizations and research bodies in a coalition letter affirming the safety and efficacy of community water fluoridation. Supporters include the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Dental Association, American Dental Hygienists Association, CareQuest Institute for Oral Health, Families USA, First Focus on Children, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, Center for Medicare Advocacy, Justice in Aging, state health societies, disabilities advocacy organizations, and many more. The letter was sent to Congress and health officials in the Administration. [Read the full letter here.](#)

Community water fluoridation and fluoride supplements ensure that all people – especially those who are at greatest risk for dental disease and who have the fewest resources to maintain their oral health – can receive cavity-preventing benefits. Even though a public hearing has taken place, it is important to advocate for community water fluoridation and the availability of fluoride supplements. Contact federal representatives to make your concerns known. We are sharing [suggested talking points](#) which you are welcome to use and encourage you to visit the [MDAC fluoride webpage](#) for additional resources.



Opportunities for High School Students to Learn About the Dental Field

Two educational programs taking place on Maryland's Eastern Shore

American Dental Education Association (ADEA) Program, Pathways to Smiles

Recently, ADEA announced the launch of *Pathways to Smiles*, an immersive training program designed to expand oral health awareness and inspire the next generation of oral health professionals by engaging high school students.

This pilot initiative will be implemented in partnership with 13 Area Health Education Center (AHEC) sites across the United States, each playing a vital role in strengthening pathways into the health professions workforce. The Eastern Shore Area Health Education Center (ESAHEC) is pleased to host one of the inaugural *Pathways to Smiles* programs, July 30th and 31st, at its Cambridge office, 814 Chesapeake Drive.

This collaboration between ADEA and AHEC sites builds on shared goals to reduce health disparities and strengthen pathways into dentistry and allied oral health careers. AHECs are uniquely positioned to support local communities, especially in rural and underserved areas where access to oral health education and resources is often limited, serving as a vital bridge between education and practice. The inaugural *Pathways to Smiles* curriculum was developed by a national advisory workgroup of oral health educators, K–12 teachers, health professions pathway program leaders, and AHEC professionals.

This two-day experience is designed to introduce high school students across the Eastern Shore to rewarding careers in the dental field. In addition to hands-on immersive activities, the instructive camp will include interactions with practicing dental professionals on the Eastern Shore who will answer questions, share experiences, and provide guidance to students interested in pursuing a career in the field. Students can also register directly [here](#).

Planet Smilez Hosts Educational Symposium at Chesapeake College

On September 27, Planet Smilez will host a [**Discovering Dentistry Symposium, Ignite Imagination with Dentistry**](#), a one-day comprehensive program designed to inspire and educate middle and high school students through hands on learning and creative problem solving. Program curriculum integrates cutting-edge advancements in dentistry with foundational principles of evidence-based practice and oral health pathway exploration, providing a comprehensive and well-rounded education. The interactive and immersive event allows students to explore the hands-on daily life as oral health professionals guided by a team of experienced board-certified dental educators and oral health enthusiasts dedicated to innovation and critical thinking in every student through small group case-based learning.

The symposium will take place on Saturday, September 27, 9am-3pm, at Chesapeake College. You can register here. [**You can register here.**](#)

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



Pathways to Bright Futures Efforts on the Eastern Shore

Maryland Department of Health began the [Pathways to Bright Futures \(PBF\) program](#) in September 2023 to address the shortage of dental professionals in underserved communities by promoting careers in dentistry in Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA), with focus areas including Western Maryland, Baltimore City, and Eastern Shore. This program is funded by HRSA and officially launched in May 2024.

Since then, efforts on the Eastern Shore have proven to be highly successful. This summary highlights Eastern Shore efforts specifically. To date, 767 students from 10 schools across 7 counties have been reached. High school and college students benefited from education and career exposure opportunities coordinated in partnership with their career counselors.

Notable success stories include:

- In 2023, a student with a bachelor's degree completed the dental assisting program at Chesapeake College. She applied to and was accepted by the University of Maryland School of Dentistry (UMSOD) for the 2024 academic year. She has since completed her first year and will soon begin her second. She is committed to returning to the Eastern Shore to practice dentistry.
- In 2025, a student who completed her first year at Lehigh University participated in an experiential learning opportunity at a participating dental office. Over three days, totaling six hours, she shadowed and was mentored by the dentist. She shared that the dentist clearly explained why procedures were necessary and emphasized individualized treatment planning. Her feedback highlighted the welcoming and supportive nature of the staff and expressed a strong increase in her interest in dentistry, along with a desire to return to the Eastern Shore.
- Also in 2025, another student completed the dental assisting program and has been accepted to the new Dental Hygiene Program at Anne Arundel Community College, starting in September.

The PBF program is successfully advancing its mission to strengthen the dental workforce and improve oral health equity throughout Maryland. For more information about PBF, visit health.maryland.gov/bright-futures

ADA Medicaid StoryBank

Collecting Stories from Patients and Providers to Help Protect Dental Benefits



The ADA is collecting provider stories to help advocate for protecting oral health in Medicaid programs. As we continue to advocate for dental services in state programs for low-income families and adults, personal experiences will demonstrate what dentists and dental professionals are doing to improve oral health.

Please ask members to share their story with the ADA here to help advocacy efforts.

Here are some sample questions you can use to engage in these discussions before they submit them on

ADA.org/storybank:

- Why do you treat patients who use Medicaid?
- What impact has their dental care had on their lives? Do any specific patients come to mind that would not have been able to get by without Medicaid dental coverage?
- Do you treat adults (19+ years old) and does your state have an adult dental benefit?

- What would happen if your state cut adults benefits due to loss of funding from the federal government?

“The passage of this legislation marks a dangerous setback for Medicaid and the millions of people who rely on it for essential health care, which includes oral health. Deep cuts to Medicaid funding, new work requirements, and caps on the mechanisms that states use to fund the program threaten to drastically reduce access to care across the country. This bill will make it harder for millions of families to afford dental care, for adults to manage chronic conditions tied to oral health, and for children and families in rural and low-income areas to find providers who can accept Medicaid or keep their doors open at all.”

Melissa Burroughs, CareQuest Institute for Oral Health, Senior Director of Public Policy, [Full text here](#).

NEWS & RESOURCES

Access/Coverage

[Medicaid Cuts and the States: Tracking State-Specific Estimates of the Impacts of Proposed Changes](#)

[Health Provisions in the 2025 Federal Budget Reconciliation Bill](#)

[State Impacts of the "One Big Beautiful Bill"](#)

Dental-Medical Integration

[If We Treated Tooth Decay Like We Treat Heart Disease, We'd Save Billions](#)

Fluoride

[Wins in Water Fluoridation](#)

[Projected Outcomes of Removing Fluoride from US Public Water Systems](#)

[Temple professor explains the importance of fluoride for dental health](#)

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

[Kennedy's Anti-Fluoride Crusade Gains Ground While Dentists Struggle to Hold the Line](#)

[ADA Defends Safety and Efficacy of Fluoride Supplements Amid FDA Review](#)

[Dentists are Struggling to Counter RFK Jr. on Fluoride](#)

General

[Emergency Department Visits for Tooth Disorders: United States, 2020–2022](#)

Health Care

[Making Health Care Affordable: Reining In Health Industry Abuses To Lower People's Costs Without Cutting Coverage](#)

Medicaid

[CMS Reinforces Medicaid and CHIP Integrity by Strengthening Eligibility Oversight and Limiting Certain Demonstration Authorities](#)

Medicare

[Medicare Will Not Expand on Dental Payment Examples in 2026](#)

Oral Health Policy

[How the Trump Administration Should Approach Oral Health](#)

Teledentistry

[Finding Kids' Caries May be a Snap for Parents](#)

Workforce

[Dentistry in the U.S. May be Failing](#)

[Student Debt by the Numbers](#)

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

[National Association of Community Health Centers](#)
[Community Health Institute](#)
[Conference and Expo 2025](#)
[August 17-19, 2025](#)
[Hyatt Regency Chicago](#)

[Chicago, IL](#)

[The National Academy for State
Health Policy Annual Conference
Riding the Waves of State Health
Policy
September 8-10, 2025
San Diego, CA](#)

[ADHA25 Annual Conference
October 4-6, 2025
Long Beach, CA](#)

[Maryland Rural Health Association
Annual Conference
Turning the Tide: Rural Health
Solutions for a Changing Maryland
October 19-21, 2025
Doubletree by Hilton Annapolis
Hotel
Annapolis, MD](#)

[ADA SmileCon®
October 23-25, 2025
Walter E. Washington Convention
Center
Washington, DC](#)

[National Network for Oral Health
Access Annual Conference
These Are My People
November 9-12, 2025
San Antonio Marriott Riverside
San Antonio, Texas](#)

**Maryland Dental Action Coalition
Biennial Oral Health Summit
Monday, November 17, 2025
Turf Valley Conference Center
Ellicott City, MD
Save the Date!**

**National Oral Health Conference
April 13-15, 2026
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Save the Date!**



Join us! To become an MDAC member, [click here.](#)

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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