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June 2026

Improving Children's Oral Health Through School Programs

Collaborative addresses next step in Maryland's oral health story

The beginning of Maryland's journey to improve the oral health for children began with the tragedy of Deamonte Driver, a teenager who died in 2007 as the result of an untreated tooth abscess. After his death, the dental and public health communities joined forces. Through their work, Maryland became the leading state in the country in improving oral health for children.



In 2025, the Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC) reassessed the data on children's oral health as part of the development of the Maryland Oral Health Plan, and MDAC's findings were concerning. After years of progress, the data showed that access to oral health care was slipping for children:

- More Maryland school-aged children have dental decay and urgent dental needs. Twenty-one percent of students had untreated tooth decay in a 2022/2023, 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. (Source: Oral Health Survey of Maryland School Children)
- Fewer Maryland children enrolled in Medicaid are receiving preventive dental care than a decade before. The number of children accessing preventative services under Medicaid has dropped from 64% during the 2016-2019 period to 60% in 2024. (Source: Maryland Department of Health's Annual Oral Health Legislative Reports)

Maryland's Next Step: Public Health Collaborative to Lead Innovation

With the data showing the need to recommit to improving children's access to oral healthcare, Delegate Heather Bagnall (D-Anne Arundel County) and Senator Clarence K. Lam (D-Anne Arundel and Howard Counties) spearheaded legislation in 2025, along

with MDAC, to establish the [Maryland Collaborative to Improve Children's Oral Health through School-Based Programs](#). The Collaborative, housed under the Maryland Department of Health, is focusing on recommendations to:

- **Meet Families Where They Are:** By focusing on school-based settings, Maryland will bring oral health services, particularly preventative services, directly to students.
- **Draw Down More Federal Funds into Schools through Medicaid:** The Collaborative will examine how to increase resources for oral health in school by drawing down more federal funds through Medicaid billing.
- **Support Dental Hygienists and School Nurses in Working at the Top of their Licenses:** Dental hygienists and school nurses are underutilized in providing preventative dental services in schools. The Collaborative will examine how to remove unnecessary barriers to practice.

The Collaborative's work will put Maryland back in the lead on children's oral health.

Open Hill Day, 2026: Oral Health Advocates on Capitol Hill

Community, state, and national representatives travel to DC for collective impact



Hill Day is a coordinated visit with members of Congress or their staff to present a unified message about a critical issue. It provides advocates and organizations an opportunity to meet with representatives in the US Senate and US House Representatives. An effective Hill Day is a powerful advocacy tool, strengthens relationships with policymakers, and amplifies policy priorities.

On June 4, MDAC staff joined over 135 oral health advocates from 38 states in Washington, DC for Oral Health

Progress and Equity Network Hill Day. The purpose of OPEN Hill Day 2026 is to translate community-driven oral health priorities into coordinated federal advocacy, equipping partners to engage policymakers with clear, evidence-based policy asks that advance access to oral health care and strengthen systems that serve communities most impacted by unmet need. OPEN Hill Day is designed to move beyond awareness-raising to focused, outcome-driven advocacy—preparing participants to advance concrete policy solutions, with a shared emphasis on the following [three policy asks](#) during visits with Congressional representatives and/or Congressional staff:

1. [Improve access to dental care for veterans.](#) Support H.R.210, the Dental Care for Veterans Act, which would eliminate current statutory restrictions and make dental care a standard benefit for all veterans enrolled in the US Department of Veterans Affairs health system.
2. [Protect access to essential oral health care by maintaining stable Medicaid funding.](#) Proposed changes under HR 1 could limit access to dental services, especially for adults who depend on these benefits to stay healthy and avoid more costly care later.
3. [Ensure oral health is represented in federal agencies.](#) Support S.3597, the Promoting Dental Health Act, to reauthorize funding for the CDC Oral Health Program for five years, enabling states to continue preventing dental disease, reducing emergency room visits, and strengthening the oral health workforce.

The Maryland delegation included representatives from MDAC, Charles County Health Department, National Dental Association, and the American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research. The Maryland delegation visited the offices of six Maryland representatives: Senator Angela Alsobrooks (D), Senator Chris Van Hollen (D), Representative April McClain Delaney (D), Representative Steny Hoyer (D), Representative Andy Harris (R), and Representative Jamie Raskin (D).

In addition to the three “asks,” the Maryland delegation also addressed concerns with the action of the Washington Sanitation and Sanitary Commission (WSSC). [According to the WSSC](#), the conflict in the Middle East has affected the global supply of fluoride leading to shortages in parts of the United States. Due to current supply constraints, fluoride levels in Baltimore, Montgomery and Prince George’s county water systems have been reduced to 0.4 mg/L. While still safe, this level falls below the range considered effective for preventing cavities. Fluoride concentrations below 0.6 mg/L do not provide the full protective benefit against tooth decay, potentially increasing the risk of cavities and dental disease over time. Staff in all congressional offices were not aware of this development, expressed concern, and ensured it would be investigated. MDAC followed up the visits with documentation.

On June 3, the day before OPEN Hill Day, the MDAC CEO, Mary Backley, and MDAC Government Affairs Advisor, Robyn Elliott, participated in a panel discussion focused on training oral health advocates participating In Hill Day. *Skills for Impact: What Policymakers Listen for in a Constrained Environment*, was a facilitated conversation grounded in real-world coalition advocacy experience, focused on what policymakers and staff are listening for right now, how budget pressures are shaping decision making, and what advocates can do to be most effective. The goal of the session was to provide practical, grounded insights that participants can take directly into their Hill meetings.

Opportunities for State Programs to Strengthen Oral Health Access in Rural Communities



In a June 2026 blog post, *Medicaid Opportunities to Strengthen Oral Health Access in Rural Communities*, Madeline Steward, Senior Program Officer, Center for Health Care Strategies, addresses a myriad of opportunities presented, including the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP), for state programs to accelerate progress through workforce expansion, care delivery innovation, and community-based models that better reach rural populations, all of which align with

Maryland RHTP areas of impact, including transforming the rural health workforce and promoting sustainable access and innovative care for rural Marylanders.

The post outlines overlapping structural barriers that limit access to oral health care and highlights the need for policy and delivery strategies that expand who can provide care and where care is delivered. Many state Medicaid programs are collaborating with partners to implement approaches recommended in the blog to improve oral health care access and disease prevention in rural communities.

Read full blog post.

Maryland Department of Health Medicaid Check-in Campaign

Information and resources for communities on changes related to H.R. 1

A new federal law, H.R. 1, signed by President Trump, changes Medicaid eligibility requirements that will significantly affect hundreds of thousands of Maryland Medicaid members. On June 1, the Trump administration issued an interim rule outlining implementation obligation for state Medicaid work requirements. The work requirements, which states must implement by January 2027, will require Medicaid expansion enrollees between the ages of 19-64 to work or engage in a qualifying community engagement for at least 80 hours a month. Historically, work requirements have led to increased disenrollment in the program, even among those who qualify.

Over the coming months, many Marylanders will need to take necessary action to maintain their health coverage. The Maryland Department of Health, Maryland Health Connection, HealthChoice Managed Care Organizations, and community partners, including MDAC, are working to help Maryland families navigate these changes.

On June 2, Deputy Secretary of Health Care Financing and Medicaid Director Perrie Briskin announced the launch of the Maryland Department of Health's H.R. 1 Medicaid Check-In Campaign. This coordinated outreach initiative is designed to help members understand upcoming program changes, know when action may be required and access trusted information and help. The campaign includes [new web pages](#) with educational and outreach resources that stakeholders can use and share within their communities.



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



Article Published on Dental Public Health Communication

The MDH Office of Oral Health (OOH) has partnered with the National Institutes of Health to write a scholarly article, which has been published in the Journal of the California Dental Association. This article, entitled "A Joint Initiative to Improve Dental Public Health Communication in Maryland" describes the process OOH utilized to improve and distribute oral health education materials. The article may be accessed on Taylor and Francis online.

Read the article here.

Maryland Dent-Care Loan Assistance Repayment Program

Application deadline approaching

The Maryland Dent Care Loan Assistance Repayment Program (MDC-LARP) helps **full time and part time 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. **Deadline to apply is July 31, 2026.**

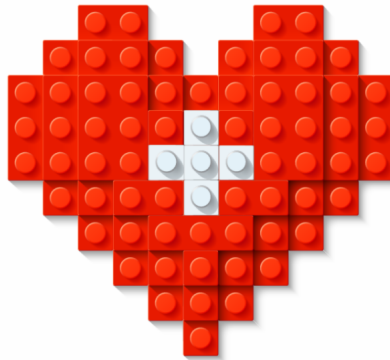
Application eligibility requirements, award amounts, and other materials along with additional information about the program, can be found on the Office of Oral Health's [website](#). Questions? Contact Stacy Costello, MPH, CHES, MDC LARP Program Manager, mdh.mdclarpprogram@maryland.gov

Share the program flyer with your networks!

"Improving oral health in rural communities requires more than a single intervention. States making the most progress are layering multiple strategies to address workforce shortages, geographic barriers, and prevention gaps. With targeted investments through RHTP and continued Medicaid innovation, states have a timely opportunity to build on these approaches and ensure that rural communities can access the oral health care they need."

Madeline Steward, Center for Health Care Strategies, June 2026,
Medicaid Opportunities to Strengthen Oral Health Access In Rural Communities

Building Innovative Care
Where It Matters Most.



National Health Center Week
August 2-8, 2026



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NEWS & RESOURCES

Access to Care

[How Community-Based Dental Residencies are Expanding Access to Care](#)

[Nearly 9.6 M Adults Have Traveled Outside the US to Receive Dental Treatment](#)

[School-Based Telehealth Interventions: Evidence Roundup - Center for Health Care Strategies](#)

Fluoride

[Survey Finds Americans More Likely To Trust ADA than RFK Jr. on Fluoride Information](#)

Maternal and Child Oral 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!

Legislative Contacts

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

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

[Maryland State Legislators](#)

[Speaking Up: A Fresh Perspective on Maternal Oral Health Education](#)

[From Pregnancy to First Tooth: 11 Question on Early Oral Health](#)

Medicaid

[A Summary of Federal Medicaid Work Requirements](#)

Medicare

[People with Medicare Need Comprehensive Dental Care: Medicare Advantage Isn't the Answer](#)

Oral Health Integration

[It's All Connected How Unmet Dental Needs Can Delay Medical Treatment](#)

[Medical-Dental Integration for Individuals with Diabetes](#)

[Best Practice Approach: Integrating Oral Health Care into Primary Care](#)

Workforce

[Dental school leaders chart a path for the future of dental education](#)

[Federal Loan Caps on Dental Education](#)

[Migration of U.S. Dentists Across State Lines](#)

[Dental Hygienists with Direct Access](#)

[Community Health Worker Programs: Guidance for Implementation and Sustainability](#)

[CHWs in Tennessee](#)

Meetings/ Events/ Webinars

[National Conference of State Legislatures Legislative Summit July 27-29, 2026 Chicago, IL](#)

[American Dental Therapy Annual Conference Rooted and Rising: Dental Therapy Education, Identity & Opportunity August 10-12, 2026 The Westin Book Cadillac Hotel Detroit, MI](#)

[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](#)

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

[Mid-Atlantic Association of Community Health Centers Annual Conference October 8-9, 2026 Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay Resort Cambridge, MD](#)

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



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.

Join MDAC

www.mdac.us

FOLLOW US



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