



Maryland
Hospital Association

**Senate Bill 284: Maryland Medical Assistance Program –
Dental Coverage for Adults**

Position: *Support*

Bill Summary

SB 284 would require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program, under certain circumstances, to provide limited dental coverage for certain adults beginning on January 1, 2020, and subject to certain limitations; requiring the Maryland Department of Health, in consultation with certain stakeholders, to study and recommend ways to structure adult dental coverage so as to balance fiscal constraints with the dental needs of enrollees; and requiring the Department to report to the Governor and the General Assembly on or before January 1, 2019.

MHA Position

Maryland's hospitals support efforts to expand coverage of needed health care services, including dental coverage for adults. Doing so yields not only important benefits for patients, but would also mitigate lengthy wait times in hospital emergency departments.

A recent report from the Maryland Dental Access Coalition highlights how a lack of dental coverage for adults adversely impacts Maryland's emergency departments. Among the findings:

- From fiscal 2013 to fiscal 2016, there were an average of more than 49,000 emergency department visits for chronic dental conditions
- Over the same time period, the average annual cost to provide these services for Medicaid enrollees was nearly \$11.5 million
- The lack of dental coverage disproportionately affects Medicaid, as the rate of visits for Medicaid enrollees is more than three times greater than the total adult population

This problem exacerbates a concern regarding wait times in Maryland's emergency departments, which are among the longest in the nation. While many factors contribute to lengthy emergency department wait times, one of the main causes is the prevalence of visits from non-emergent patients who don't truly need emergency care.

Expanding access to dental coverage would help reduce the reliance of Medicaid enrollees on hospital emergency departments for their dental needs and contribute to efforts to shorten wait times statewide.

For these reasons, we urge you to give SB 284 a *favorable* report.