

Topic: Providing Incentive for Dental Practitioners to work in underserved areas

Statement of Issue:

Tooth decay is the most common chronic condition experienced by children and is more common than asthma or hay fever. In California, 54 percent of kindergarteners and 70 percent of third graders have experienced dental caries and nearly one-third of children have untreated tooth decay (in 2004). California children miss 874,000 days of school each year due to dental problems. In 2016, approximately 51 percent of the 11.1 million children (ages 0-20) in California had dental insurance coverage through Medi-Cal/Denti-Cal, and in 2015, only 44 percent of beneficiaries enrolled for at least 90 continuous days received at least 1 dental service through the program. There are 53 dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) in California. Approximately 5 percent of Californians (1,760,361 people) live in a dental HPSA. Why are so many children that are covered through Medicaid not seeing a dentist regularly? The Medicaid reimbursement rates are so low that most dentists cannot reach ends meet.

Policy Options

Increase the Medicaid reimbursement rates in California

Medicaid reimbursement rates can be increased for pediatric patients (12 years and under) and patients with developmental disabilities encouraging more practitioners to see these patients

Provide tax breaks for practitioners that see a certain number of Medicaid patients.

Medicaid is a government program. Practitioners that have a practice in which more than 50% of its patient populous is covered through Medicaid will receive a tax break and will be exempt California income taxes for the years that they participate.

Policy Recommendations

Because there is far more financial incentive for dentists in California to see patients that have either PPO type insurances or that are fee for service, a vast number of patient's do not receive dental care. Medicaid practices also tend to see a higher volume of patient's in order to make up for the financial shortages of Medicaid reimbursement, lowering the quality of work and dissuading many dentists from seeing these patients. Higher reimbursement rates and tax breaks will incentivize more dentists to see these patients and will require less volume of patient's to be seen, improving the quality of care.

Sources

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