



Meeting the Basic Needs of All Minnesotans—Access to Dental Care

Description: The ability of all Minnesotans to access dental care to prevent pain and infection is severely limited for certain populations including those with mental illness and disability, the elderly, and those who are low-income. The inability to find a provider is due to many reasons:

- For those with mental illness or disability it is difficult to find a provider who is properly trained or who is able to provide the physical space and necessary equipment to provide treatment.
- For those who are low-income and rely on public assistance programs the reimbursement rates are so low that many dental providers do not accept public assistance program clients. This is an especially difficult problem in rural areas of Minnesota in which no dental providers are available requiring some patients to drive hours to find a provider.
- For recipients of MA, necessary services may not be covered, such as anesthesia for oral surgery.

Proposed Action/Solution—The Minnesota Social Service Association, believes that access to dental care is a basic need that all Minnesotans should have access to. Further, MSSA believes and supports the following changes to increase access to dental services for all Minnesotans:

1. Increase the reimbursement rates providers receive through public health care programs and ensure all necessary dental services are covered.
2. Provide incentives that would increase the number of providers who are able to treat disabled and mentally ill.
3. Develop and implement educational initiatives for those with special health needs to teach proactive and preventative oral hygiene skills.

The oral health system—including providers, patients, caregivers, insurance companies, the Department of Human Services and the Minnesota Department of Health should work together to ensure the oral health needs of all Minnesotans are met.

Consequence of No Change— The inability to access regular dental care leads many Minnesotans to forgo preventative care, as pain and infection persist treatment is sought through hospital emergency departments. Further, recent research shows that lack of oral care results in other health conditions including increased heart disease, dementia, respiratory infections and diabetic complications. The consequences come with a much higher cost than preventative care.