

United Seniors of Oregon/Oregon State Council for Retired Citizens

Increased Dental Care for Dual Eligible Seniors

HB 2834-3, House Health Care Committee

April 14, 2017

Dr. Jim Davis

United Seniors of Oregon/Oregon State Council for Retired Citizens
National Coalition of Consumer Organizations on Aging/NCOA

United Seniors of Oregon and the Oregon State Council for Retired Citizens would like to express its support for efforts through amendments to HB 2834 to increase dental coverage for seniors eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid up to 300% of the poverty line.

Dental coverage for seniors is a critical and essential part of healthy aging, but is also an often neglected area of elder health care. It affects all aspects of a senior's life, including medical, psycho-social and other physical and emotional aspects of well-being.

Without integrated dental preventive and maintenance approaches to natural teeth and oral tissues, there can be dire results. Certainly, many seniors can experience severe gum disease and potentially end up losing their teeth, and then have to deal with either partial or full dentures. It can affect disease and longevity. Periodontal disease can: negatively affect metabolic control of diabetes; can increase symptoms of respiratory disease; and has been associated with increases in certain types of heart disease and stroke.

Poor oral health can have emotional effects - such as missing teeth and bad breath - which can adversely impact social interactions and lead to social isolation and depression. It is critical that seniors have on-going socialization and human relationships to establish better psycho-social well-being. Poor dental health and lack of access to dental care can create barriers.

There are also many financial barriers for senior related to dental health. There is no mandated dental coverage under Medicare. Dental insurance options can be limited and expensive. As a result, seniors may neglect their dental care.

Dual eligible seniors are amongst the poorest of elders and often have more health-related problems. But they do have some dental options with Medicaid. Those options need to be expanded. HB 2834-3 would take an important step to expanding dental benefits for lower-income, dual-eligible seniors. Ultimately, the state will save money by making this investment; because seniors who appropriately utilize these dental benefits will realize stronger health well-being.

We urge your support of legislation that would increase dental benefits for low-income, dual-eligible seniors.