

To: Co-Chairs Senator Steiner Hayward, Representative Prusak
Vice Chairs Senator Kennemer and Representative Hayden
Members of the Bridge Health Care Program Task Force

From: Oregon Dental Association

Date: May 24, 2022

Re: Inclusion of Dental Benefits in the Bridge Program

The Oregon Dental Association (ODA) represents over 2,100 practicing dentists across all corners of the state. Our members are committed to improving access to dental care and were pleased that House Bill 4035 included language stating that dental benefits should be included in the Bridge Program, “to the extent practicable”. We are pleased that the Task Force has dedicated meeting time to discussing the issue.

Further, ODA was very encouraged to hear Mr. Vandehey’s, Oregon Health Authority, comments at the first meeting, stating that the intent is to include a dental package similar to what is available to adult participants in the Oregon Health Plan (OHP) today.

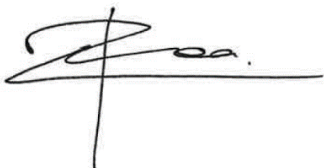
The Oregon Health Plan offers comprehensive dental coverage, from regular cleanings to fillings, extractions, dentures, crowns, and emergency care. The ODA agrees that the Bridge Program should seek to match this coverage at minimum to provide continuity of care for patients.

Good dental care is a critical piece of overall health. As this Task Force well knows, an untreated dental issue can quickly devolve into significant and costly health issues like, heart disease, cancer or diabetes. Untreated oral pain is also high driver of unnecessary emergency department visits.

ODA also appreciates Mr. Vandehey’s comments during the first meeting related to provider reimbursement. Participation in OHP provider panels is often hampered due to low reimbursement rates. Dental offices are particularly vulnerable to low reimbursement rates due to high overhead and equipment costs, and we know that low Medicaid reimbursement directly causes dentists to limit the number of Medicaid patients they see. Ensuring a robust— higher than Medicaid—reimbursement structure will enable stronger provider participation and increase access to care to those most in need.

We are very concerned that the 2022 EHB “Oregon Benchmark Plan” included in meeting materials does not include full adult dental benefits. It is not yet clear how these materials will guide the discussion, or if they are meant to be used as a base for the Bridge Program. If that is the case, the ODA urges the committee to expand on the EHB and include dental benefits for all Bridge Program participants, regardless of age, and also include strong reimbursement rates for dental providers that participate in the Bridge Program. A person cannot live a healthy life if they cannot access basic adult oral healthcare.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Calie Roa', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr. Calie Roa, ODA President