

March 11, 2025

Dear Chair Nosse, Vice Chairs Javadi and Nelson, & Members of House Committee on Behavioral and Health Care Members:

The Oregon Dental Association (ODA) is committed to advancing the dental profession and ensuring the highest standard of oral health and oral healthcare for all Oregonians. As a voluntary membership organization representing Oregon's dentists, we provide continuing education, advocacy, and public information initiatives aimed at promoting good dental health across the state.

Dentists in Oregon are deeply committed to serving their communities and improving the oral health of all Oregonians, which is why we are deeply concerned about the decline of Medicaid dental investments. HB 2597, which requires the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to establish a dental rate that considers the market value of dental services every two years. Utilizing a market benchmark in the rate setting process should result in an overall rate that better supports the actual cost to deliver dental care and thus will help expand access to oral health care across the state.

The saying that "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" holds especially true in oral healthcare, and investments in preventive services can reduce long-term healthcare costs, improve health outcomes, and enhance quality of life. Unfortunately, oral health services account for less than 4% of CCOs' global budgets, a discrepancy that hinders the effectiveness of the system and our goal of eliminating health disparities/inequities by 2030.

OHA has made commendable strides in expanding access to dental benefits since 2003, with the Oregon Health Plan Plus plan providing an enhanced dental benefit. However, over the past several years, OHA has made cuts to dental rates. These rate reductions make it unsustainable or nearly impossible for dentists to see patients covered by OHP. Most dental offices have an administrative overhead cost of 60%. The average OHP reimbursement for adult services is now 25.5% of an average dentist's costs according to an American Dental Association Health Policy Institute report. That means that dentists are losing money on every visit with a patient who has OHP. This is not a sustainable business practice, so we regularly see dentists dropping OHP or refusing to accept it in the first place, which furthers our existing challenges around access to care.

The state's oral health delivery system continues to rely on a fragile workforce, which is at risk of declining further if reimbursement rates are not sustainable. The fragility of this network is further exacerbated by greater disease acuity – which means that patients need greater treatment when they eventually seek care – and low utilization of services.

Medicaid dental rates are at a tipping point. Without a justified re-basing of payment rates, Oregonians' oral and overall health will be at risk. We must be bold in addressing this threat to our state's health. We urge you to support HB 2597 and investment in Oregonians' oral health.

Sincerely,



Caroline Zeller, DDS
President, Oregon Dental Association