

Testimony Regarding H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2023 and Making Appropriations Therefor: Human Services

**Testimony of Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, MPH
Executive Director of The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Inc.
Before the Appropriations Committee**

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Hartley, Representative Dathan and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin and I am testifying on behalf of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI). COHI is a nonprofit oral health advocacy organization with the mission of increasing access to quality, affordable oral health services for all Connecticut residents. COHI is also a member of the Medicaid Strategy Group, a coalition of Connecticut Medicaid advocates. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding the Governor's Proposed FY 2022-2023 Budget for Human Services.

We urge policymakers to amend this budget to restore HUSKY A eligibility and expand HUSKY D eligibility to 201% of the federal poverty level.

HUSKY offers comprehensive coverage without copays. Lack of coverage and the high cost of care is the main reason people forgo health services, including dental care. Regular and routine oral health care improves health outcomes and creates medical/health savings. Dental coverage in Medicaid helps adults obtain and maintain employment, helps kids stay in school, and reduces costly emergency room (ER or ED) visits.¹ Health and dental coverage are essential to low-income people accessing care and preventing costly, serious health conditions.

Opening HUSKY to more low-income residents would make Connecticut a safer and healthier state. In this horrible pandemic we learned that our neighbors health impacts ours.

Additionally, expanding Medicaid coverage saves lives and saves State dollars.^{2, 3, 4} Savings are largely attributed to the decrease in costly ED visits and the increase in earlier detection and treatment of illness. Restoring and expanding eligibility is the right thing to do and the fiscally responsible thing to do.

¹ Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits. DentaQuest Partnership for Oral Health Advancement. 2020.

<https://www.dentaquestpartnership.org/system/files/Medicaid-Adult-Dental-Benefits.pdf>

² The Impact of Medicaid Expansion on States' Budgets. The Commonwealth Fund. 2020.

<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2020/may/impact-medicaid-expansion-states-budgets>

³ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. States Expanding Medicaid See Significant Budget Savings and Revenue Gains. 2016.

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2015/04/states-expanding-medicaid-see-significant-budget-savings-and-rev.html>

⁴ Medicaid Expansion is Producing Large Gains in health Coverage and Savings States Money. Center of Budget and Policy Priorities. 2015. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/medicaid-expansion-is-producing-large-gains-in-health-coverage-and-saving-states#:~:text=%20Medicaid%20Expansion%20Is%20Producing%20Large%20Gains%20in,Expanding%20Medicaid%20Mean%20Hospitals%20Treat%20Fewer...%20More%20>

Thank you for your time. We welcome the opportunity to further discuss this matter and offer our assistance. I am best reached via email at pareesa@ctoralhealth.org.

Respectfully,

Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin, MPH
Executive Director

DENTAL COVERAGE IS CRITICAL

RESTORE HUSKY A & EXPAND HUSKY D ELIGIBILITY TO 201% OF FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL



Reducing or eliminating Medicaid adult dental benefits has led to significant increases in dental-related emergency department visits and associated costs in states like California, Maryland, and Oregon.



Ensuring low-income adults have access to comprehensive dental coverage can improve employability. Adults lose millions of work hours each year due to dental disease.



Increasing access to dental coverage can help to reduce disparities because untreated dental disease disproportionately affects racial and ethnic minorities.



Treatment of gum disease can lead to better overall health, lower health care costs, and fewer hospitalizations.

Sources:

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