

## **The Impact of the Proposed Elimination of Medi-Cal Adult Dental Services on the Clinic Safety Net**

Not-for-profit community clinics and health centers share a common mission to serve everyone who walks through their door, regardless of their ability to pay. In many California counties, they are responsible for providing a significant proportion of comprehensive primary care services to those who are publicly subsidized or uninsured. In 2007, 256 primary care clinic sites provided dental services to Medi-Cal Beneficiaries. For these clinics, funding from the Denti-Cal program for both children and adults is vital.

CPCA surveyed over 70 community clinics and health centers across the state to illuminate the impact of the proposed elimination of Medi-Cal reimbursement for adult dental services. These clinics represent a cross-section of those providing dental services as part of California's safety net, including sites in both rural and urban communities. According to the survey:

- Community clinics and health centers (CCHCs) provide approximately 1.1 million dental encounters to Medi-Cal beneficiaries.
- Thirty-seven percent of these dental visits (or approximately 407,000 visits) are adults.
- CCHCs will lose approximately \$56.5 million in Medi-Cal revenue.

While the elimination of adult benefits will purportedly save money in the state budget, the costs to patient health and the stability of the safety net far outweigh any potential savings. In particular, clinics report that the elimination of adult dental will result in the following consequences:

### **Eliminations to adult dental will result in the elimination of clinics' entire dental programs.**

Community clinics and health centers rely heavily on Medi-Cal funding. An overwhelming majority of clinics reported that the proposed elimination would devastate their entire dental program. "Our clinic would have to close and we could not offer any more services to any other populations. Our financial viability depends on Medi-Cal reimbursements for services provided to adults." According to another clinic, "The fees from our adult Medi-Cal patients are more than 50% of our dental patient fees. Without this reimbursement, we could not offer [dental] service[s] to our sliding scale, CMSP and Healthy Families clients." Not only will Medi-Cal beneficiaries be affected, but other patients that rely on the clinics for dental services will be as well.

**Rural areas will suffer disproportionately from the elimination of adult dental.** In rural areas, providers are limited, and dental providers serving Medi-Cal patients are especially scarce. Some clinics report that without their dental clinic, patients would have to endure 50-60 mile trips to secure dental services. One clinic in a rural area commented, "We are the only dental provider in an area larger than Rhode Island - closing our dental clinic would remove all access to dental care for the rural communities that we serve."

**The elimination of Medi-Cal fund for adult dental would result in reductions in services, layoffs of staff and longer wait times.** Since clinics rely so heavily on Medi-Cal, any reductions to these funds will drastically affect their whole dental program operations. One clinic shared,



“We would lose 1 full time dentist, 3 part time dentists, 3 RDAs and 1 receptionist. We would have much longer wait times to get an appointment.”

Reducing such critical Medi-Cal services as adult dental will only exacerbate overall health conditions for the population with the greatest need for dental services, and those most vulnerable to oral health complications, and result in severe damage to the safety net.

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