

HD1127/SD653

An Act relative to the sustainability of public health dental hygienists through adequate reimbursements

Sponsored by Rep. Smitty Pignatelli and Senator Robyn Kennedy



Background

- In 2009, MA passed an omnibus oral health bill, which allowed dental hygienists who have additional training and a written collaborative agreement with a licensed dentist to work in public health settings without supervision.
- According to this law, **public health dental hygienists** can only bill MassHealth, and cannot bill any third-party insurance carriers.
- Public Health Dental Hygienists (PHDHs) serve individuals in senior centers, community health centers, and a variety of other clients who have different levels of access to health insurance.
- Many individuals with private insurance, including children, still lack access to adequate dental care and require the services of PHDHs. PHDHs often do not turn away these patients.
- A 2009 survey of community health center dental directors conducted by DPH's Office of Oral Health found that almost one quarter of the care provided by a PHDH was left uncompensated.
- Allowing PHDHs to bill private insurers for these services will ensure the sustainability of the PHDHs' practices while continuing to provide dental care to individuals who would not receive care otherwise.

Increasing Equitable Access to Healthcare

Access to dental care, both preventive and restorative, is disproportionately difficult for low-income and minority populations. Before the creation of PHDHs, many community health centers could not provide dental care to lower-income and minority residents. Additionally, in 2008, only 2% of Massachusetts dentists practiced in a community health center. Only 4 out of 10 dentists provide care for MassHealth patients - PHDHs have addressed the coverage gap for these patients. PHDHs also increase service for children: in FY14, 33 PHDHs provided services for over 9,000 patients each year, and about half of those served were school-aged children.

Access to Preventive Dental Care has still not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Those who do not have access to regular preventative dental services tend to require more expensive, out-of-pocket emergency services - care from PHDHS can prevent these expensive services.

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Seeing an oral health care provider helps to:

- Promote oral disease prevention
- Promote a well-balanced diet low in free sugars and high in fruit and vegetables, with water as main drink
- Prevent use of tobacco products
- Reduce alcohol consumption
- Encourage the use of protective equipment when doing relevant activities to reduce the risk of facial injury
- Promote twice a day tooth brushing



Massachusetts Oral Health Fast Facts

- 81.6% of adults who have graduated college in MA have visited the dentist in the past year
- 49.7% of adults who have less than a high school degree have visited the dentist in the past year
- 12.1 percent of adults aged 65 or older have lost ALL of their natural teeth due to tooth decay or gum disease
- 31% of adults aged 65 or older have lost six or more teeth due to tooth decay

**Please Support HD1127/SD653 and
Increase Access to Oral Healthcare
across the Commonwealth!**

73% of all MA residents have visited a dentist or dental clinic in the past year: 76.4% identified as white, 60.9% identified as Black, and 64.6% identified as Hispanic.

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