



Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits

OPEN Take 60

September 30, 2025



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Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits Are Not Optional!

Oral Health is Health!



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Housekeeping

- Today's meeting is being recorded
- All lines muted upon entry
- Please add questions to Q&A box
- Share comments to chat box
- Recording & slides provided post-event
- If comfortable, please add your pronouns to your Zoom name



Agenda

- 1 | Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage

- 2 | Current Challenges and Threats to Coverage

- 3 | Panel: A View from the Field

- 4 | Q&A

Speakers



Stacey Auger

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Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage

Importance of Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage

Oral health is directly linked to overall health and well-being and is closely linked with employability, financial security, and social connectedness.

Adults with dental coverage:



Have greater access to and utilization of regular dental care than those without coverage.



Are more likely to enter and remain in the workforce.



Are less likely to seek care in hospital emergency departments.



Have children who are more likely to receive timely and appropriate dental care.

Current State of Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage

Medicaid adult dental benefits are classified as “optional” by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).*

This means that states can:

- limit the type and/or number of services they cover
- limit the different beneficiary groups they cover
- exclude adult dental services entirely

As a result, Medicaid adult dental coverage varies widely from state to state.

National Coverage Landscape

2020 to 2024 has marked one of the most significant expansions of Medicaid adult dental benefits in recent decades.

During this time:

28

States have expanded benefits by one or more services and/or increased frequency of coverage for existing services.

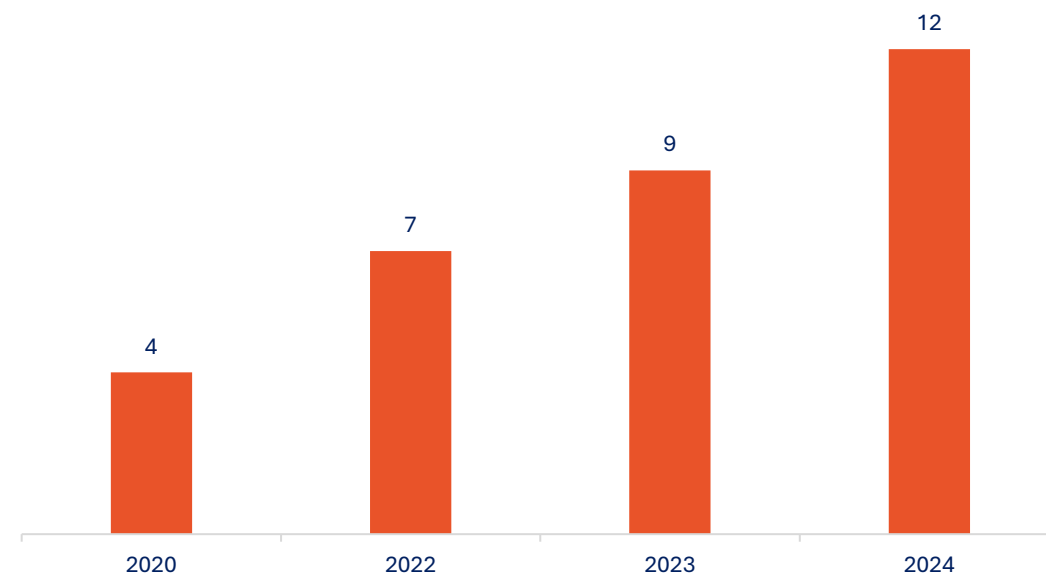
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States have increased their annual benefit maximum or eliminated it.

11

States and DC now offer extensive coverage to all adult beneficiaries.

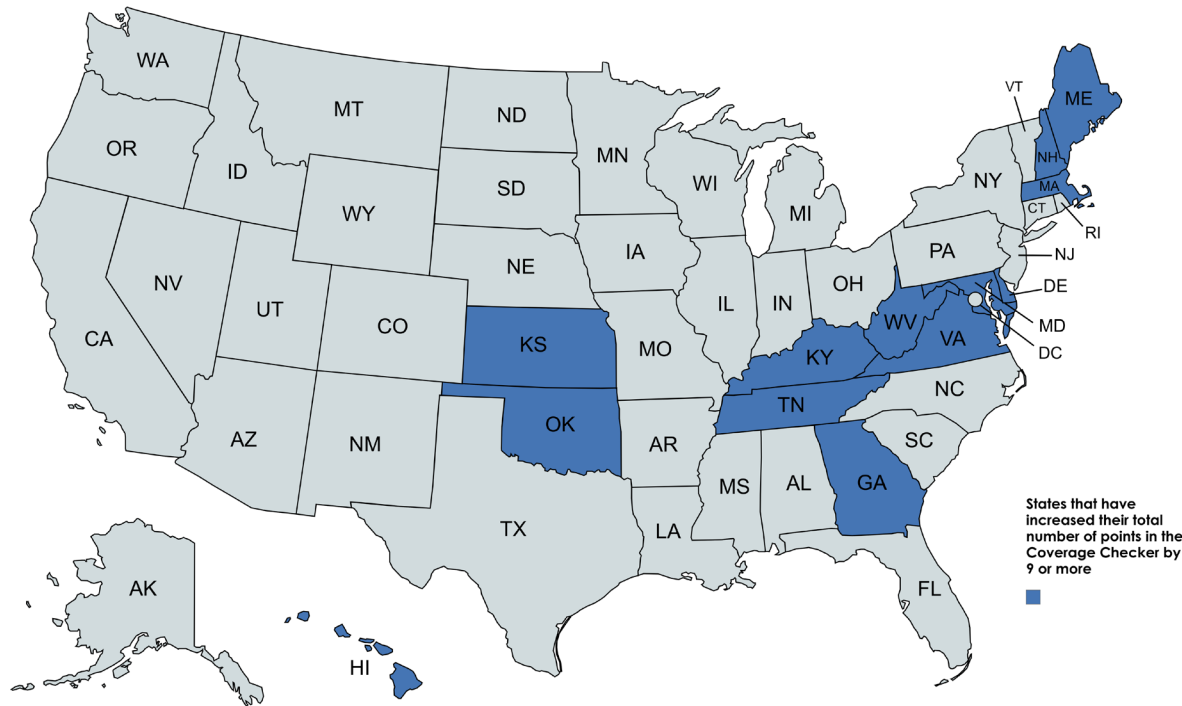
Number of States Offering an Extensive Medicaid Adult Dental Benefit*



**to the largest group of Categorically Needy Medicaid adults ages 21-64.*

National Coverage Landscape

States with the greatest expansions and restorations of benefits for all adults from 2020 to 2024.



State and date/s of expansion or restorations:

Delaware: 2020

Georgia: 2024

Hawaii: 2023

Kansas: 2022-2024

Kentucky: 2023

Maine: 2022

Maryland: 2023

New Hampshire: 2023

Oklahoma: 2021

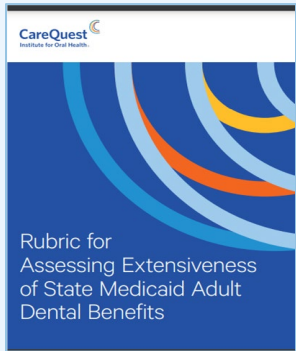
Tennessee: 2023

Virginia: 2021

West Virginia: 2021

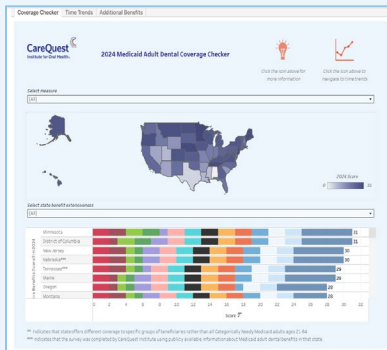
**and previous years between 2014-2019*

Tools to Assess Coverage



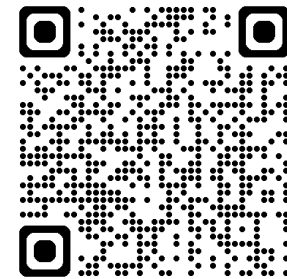
Rubric for Assessing Extensiveness of State Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits (Rubric)

A [survey tool](#) that defines an extensive Medicaid adult dental benefit *and* assesses the extensiveness of existing coverage within each state.



Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage Checker (Coverage Checker)

An [interactive tool](#) that displays state-by-state results of Rubric surveys conducted in 2020, 2022, 2023, and 2024.



The Rubric Defines an Extensive Medicaid Adult Dental Benefit

As one that provides coverage for a range of dental procedures considered adequate for the prevention of disease and promotion of oral health, the restoration of oral structures to health and function, and the treatment of emergency/urgent conditions for the largest group of Categorically Needy Medicaid adult beneficiaries ages 21-64.

To meet this definition, a state must:

- provide coverage in each of the survey measures;
- have no annual benefit maximum or an annual benefit maximum greater than or equal to \$1,000; and
- provide coverage to all adult beneficiaries.

Survey Measures

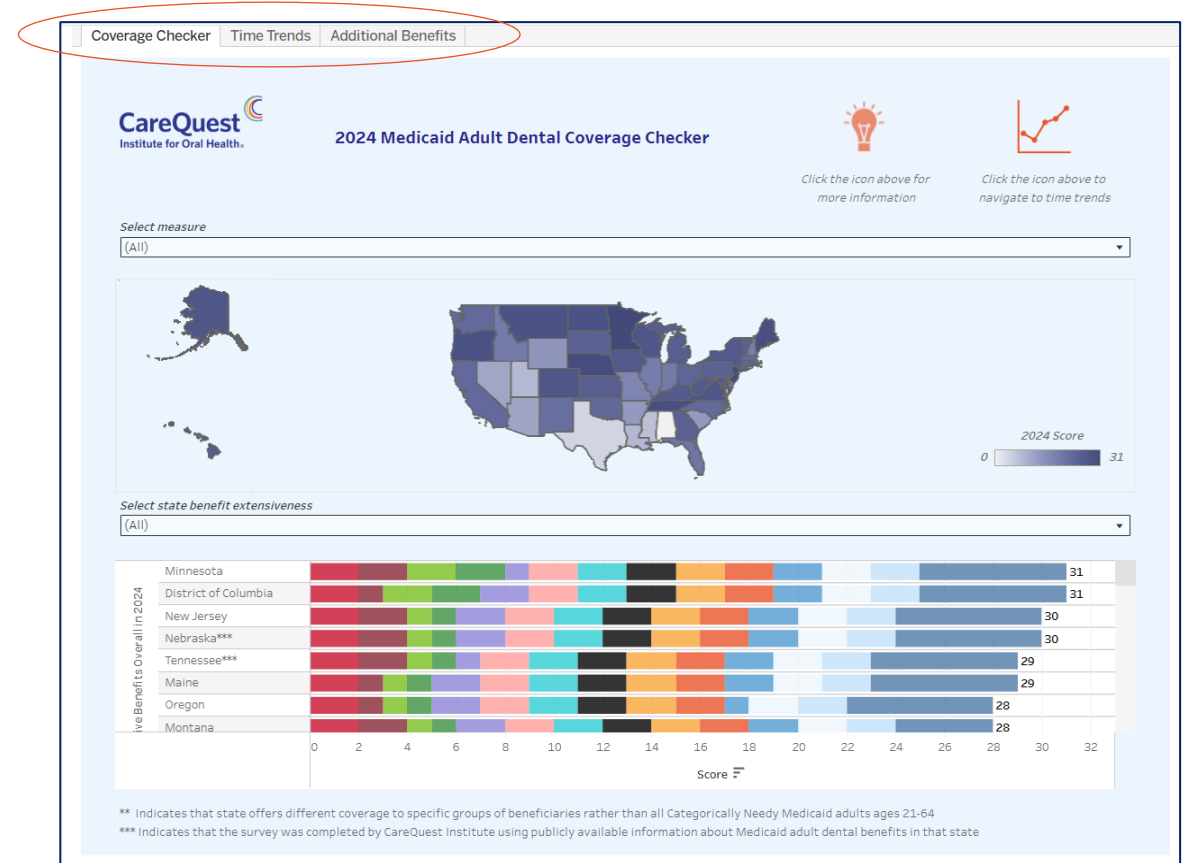
	Annual Benefit Maximum
	Diagnostic Services (periodic & comprehensive evaluation)
	Diagnostic Services (limited oral evaluation: problem focused)
	Preventive Services (prophylaxis)
	Preventive Services (application of fluoride)
	Restorative Services (fillings)
	Restorative Services (crowns)
	Endodontic Services (anterior root canal therapy)
	Endodontic Services (posterior root canal therapy)
	Periodontal Services (root planing and scaling, perio. maintenance)
	Prosthodontic Services (complete dentures)
	Prosthodontic Services (partial dentures)
	Prosthodontic Services (relines and rebase)
	Extraction Services (extractions)

The Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage Checker

The Coverage Checker contains three main sections:

- Map with responses by survey measure and benefits continuum with points received by survey measure by state.
- Time trends (2020, 2022, 2023, 2024).
- Additional 2024 Benefit/Program Information.

Each section can be accessed by the tabs located at the top of the page.



Click [here](#) to download a tutorial on using the 2024 Coverage Checker.

Current Challenges and Threats to Coverage

Medicaid Cuts Threaten Oral Health Access

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, passed on July 4, 2025, included deep cuts to Medicaid that will have lasting impacts on oral health care:

New work requirements and eligibility redeterminations will result in unnecessary loss of coverage.

Cuts to provider taxes threaten adult dental benefits.

Now is the time to engage with policymakers to delay or offset potential state budget cuts, minimize coverage losses, and protect adult dental benefits.



Additional Resources

- 1 **Policy Perspective:** Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits May Be Optional in Some States, but Oral Health Is Not
- 2 **Report:** Medicaid Adult Dental Benefits Offered to Specific Beneficiary Groups as of December 2024
- 3 **Fact Sheet:** The Need for Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage Across All States
- 4 **Timeline:** Federal Budget Reconciliation Law Implementation Timeline For Key Medicaid, Medicare, and Marketplace Provisions
- 5 **Issue Brief:** Cuts Threaten State Dental Benefits: Lessons from 6 States
- 6 **Issue Brief:** What Happens if the Adult Medicaid Dental Benefit Goes Away?

Panel

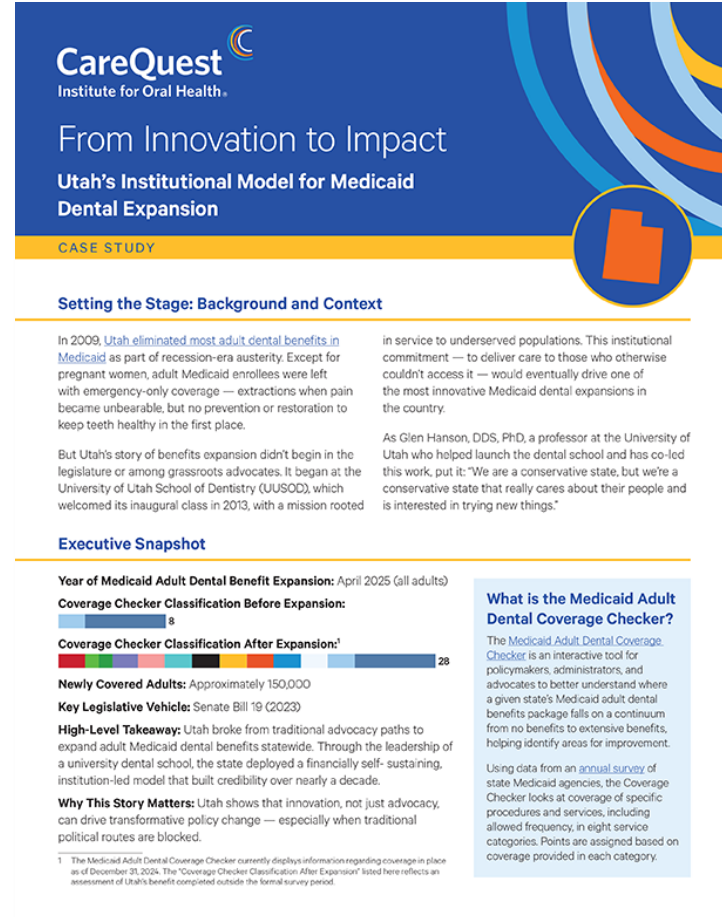
A View from the Field

From Innovation to Impact: Utah's Institutional Model of Medicaid Dental Expansion

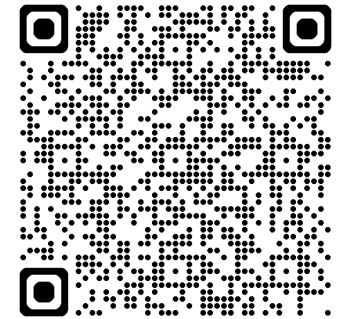
The first in a series of five case studies focused on the expansion of Medicaid adult dental benefits.

Case studies:

- Were informed by the findings of extensive key informant interviews and related research.
- Provide a positive and hopeful picture of the nationwide Medicaid adult dental benefits landscape.
- Explain the story behind the story of efforts to expand benefits.
- Identify strategies, partnerships, and lessons that can inform future efforts.



Scan to read the case study



Medicaid basics

Key facts

- Single **largest insurer** in every state
- Critical **engine in state economies** and significant item in state budgets

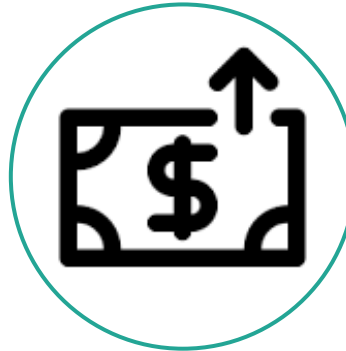
Spending on Medicaid

- Medicaid represents **\$1 out of every \$6** spent on healthcare
- 3rd largest spending program in federal budget
- One of the largest budget items in state budgets

Utah Medicaid specifics



350,000
members
every month



\$5.3 Billion
(SFY24)
expenditures



338
employees

Four priorities to guide our work



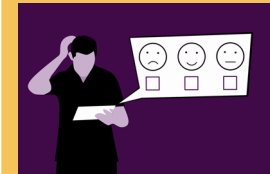
**Elevate
Member
Voice**



**Prioritize
Integration**



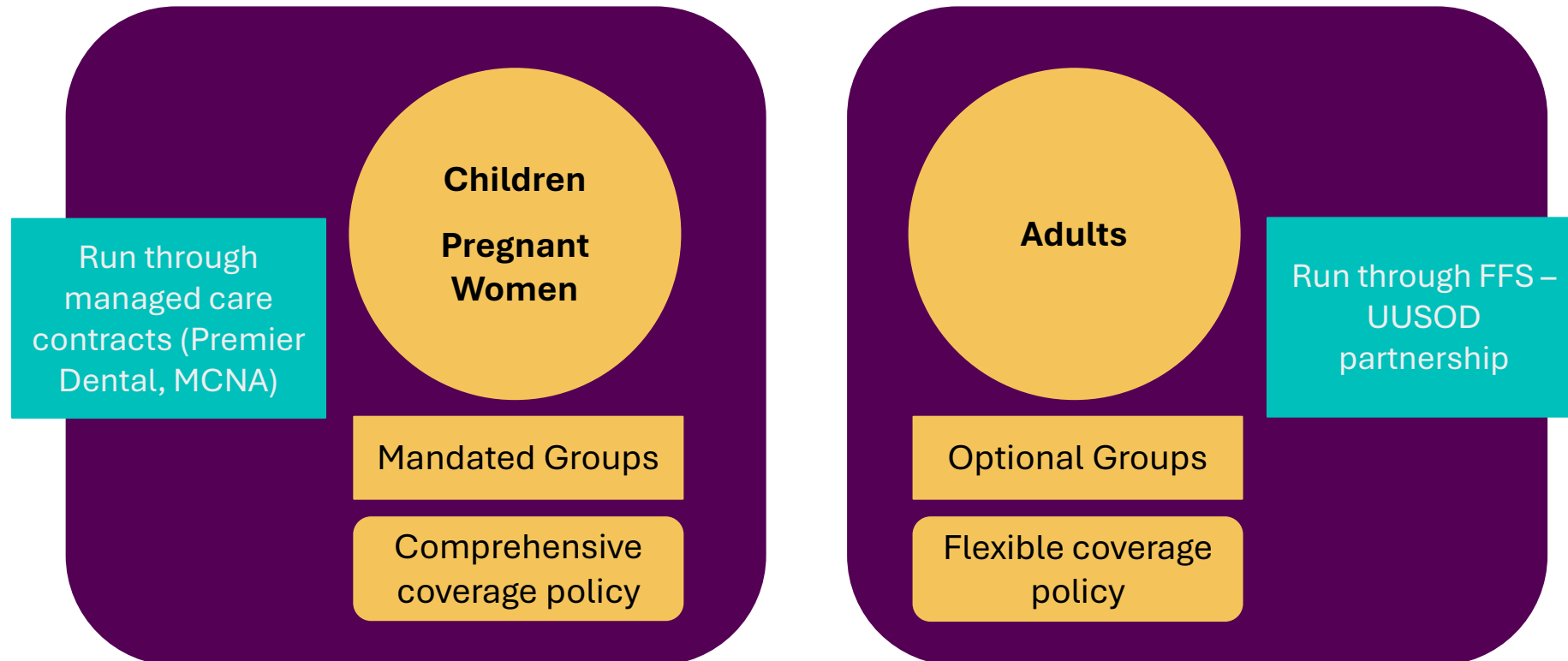
**Emphasize
Preventative
Care**



**Address
Quality
of Care**

About Utah Medicaid adult dental benefits

Utah's Medicaid adult dental program has two components:



Fee for Service Dental Delivery and Utilization



Fee for service dental delivery is a partnership between the Medicaid agency and the University of Utah School of Dentistry (UUSOD)

DHHS:

- Develops Medicaid policy
- Review prior authorizations
- Processes claims / resolves grievances

UUSOD:

- Grows the provider network
- Provides provider supports, listening sessions, educational initiatives
- Serves as a community liaison for providers to DHHS

Fee for Service Dental Delivery and Utilization



During the 2023 General Session of the Utah State Legislature Senate Bill 19 “**Medicaid Dental Waiver Amendments**” was passed and signed into law.

State received CMS approval in January and began offering dental services to 70,000 adult expansion individuals in April 2025!

Expansion of Utah Medicaid Dental Benefits

Effective April 2025, adults covered by Utah Medicaid are eligible to receive comprehensive oral healthcare benefits.

Benefits include:

- Check-ups, x-rays, and cleanings every six months
- Tooth-colored fillings for front teeth
- Silver and tooth-colored fillings for back teeth
- Root canal treatment for certain teeth
- Tooth extractions
- Dentures or partial dentures
- Emergency exams for sudden and severe tooth pain
- Crowns (porcelain and porcelain-to-metal crowns)

Evolution of the Medicaid dental program

Most adult dental benefits are eliminated.
Coverage remains for pregnant women. All other
adults have emergency-only coverage

Senate Bill 39 authorized dental
benefits for adults with disabilities,
delivered through UUSOD

Coverage added for those in Targeted
Adult Medicaid (TAM) with substance
use disorder (1,500 members)

Senate Bill 19 requires state to
seek approval from Centers for
Medicare & Medicaid for full
statewide expansion using
UUSOD model

2009

2013

2016

2017

2019

2020

2023

2025

UUSOD welcomes
inaugural class

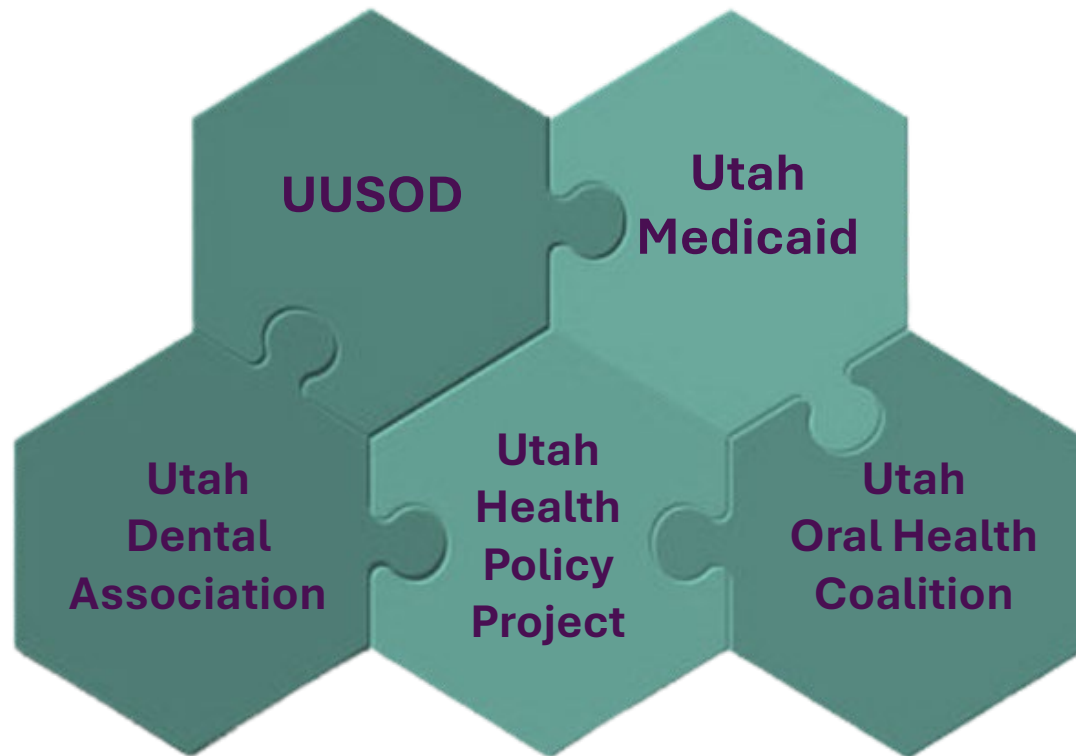
UUSOD's Salt Lake clinic
and UUSOD associated
providers begin providing
dental services to newly
covered members (45,000
members)

Coverage added for
adults 65 and older
(10,000 members)

CMS approves waiver
application; statewide
implementation of expanded
Medicaid adult dental
coverage begins in April
(100,000 members)

Advocacy and Stakeholder Collaboration

Institutional leadership and planful coalition-building



“From the start, all of the partners’ missions were aligned. We all had a commitment to problem-solve and get it right because we all wanted to serve the person. This was a beautiful alignment that really helped us to constantly innovate and commit resources to making it happen.”

UUSOD as a policy entrepreneur

University of Utah School of Dentistry (UUSOD)
was a *policy entrepreneur* that served as a:

Provider: developed the [Associated Provider Model](#) and recruited dentists to deliver patient care through Medicaid.

Funder: covered the state's share of Medicaid costs making adult dental coverage budget neutral.

Evaluator: conducted the [FLOSS study](#) which demonstrates impact of dental care on quality of life.

Policy advocate: provided non-partisan and solutions-focused ideas and proposals.



Medicaid as a strategic force

Utah Medicaid was a strategic force:

Providing leadership: advancing oral health as a core component in whole-person health and articulating its alignment with prevention, behavioral health, and cost-containment.

Serving as convener and educator: listening to concerns and past experiences of providers to further develop the program, payment structures, and provide effective and streamlined communications.

Enacting long-term vision: working with partners, to develop and expand the program incrementally all while planning and moving towards coverage for all.



Having a benefit card isn't enough

Providing a benefit does not automatically mean members can access care.

Sustained engagement is needed to ensure benefits translate into accessible, quality care.

Time and attention must be spent:

- understanding needs of patients and providers
- building trust and buy-in
- educating
- evaluating and refining



Overcoming barriers

Building Trust: Bringing providers into the program

The Associated Provider model allows dentists to participate in Medicaid without becoming university employees or giving up practice independence.

The model offers:

- Competitive reimbursement
- Rapid payment
- Elimination of copayments

Concrete improvements began to shift provider attitudes.

“Over the last five years we have gathered momentum and now so many dentists are saying ‘This is really good, this works!’”

Overcoming barriers

Building Legislative Buy-In: Addressing legislative skepticism

Over the course of the program, legislative skepticism lingered among some lawmakers wary of expanding public benefits.

Partners emphasized:

- Joint program run through state Medicaid system and implemented by UUSOD
- Program did not involve managed care entities
- UUSOD would cover costs

Unlike many states where fiscal concerns halt Medicaid benefit expansions, the dental school had a unique proposition: UUSOD would not only deliver care but would also cover the state's share of Medicaid costs.

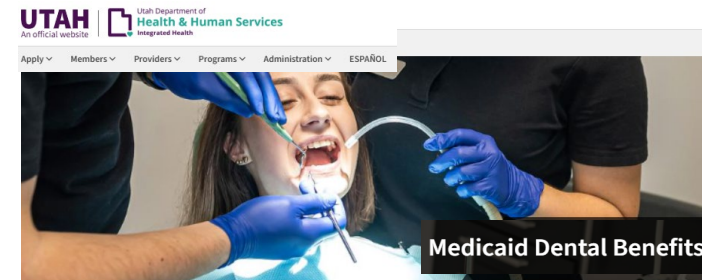
Overcoming barriers

Building Community Buy-In: Educating members and providers

Ensuring patients understand their coverage and providers understand the program is crucial. Utah Medicaid and UUSOD worked together to align messaging and streamline communication.

Together they:

- Developed brochures, promotional materials, newsletter articles
- Conducted helpline trainings
- Conducted local and regional meetings



Dental care is a covered service for Medicaid members. For information about your dental plan or to find a dental provider, visit the [Dental Coverage and Plans webpage](#).

Benefits Include

- Check-ups, x-rays, and cleanings every six months
- Tooth colored fillings for front teeth
- Silver fillings for back teeth
- Root canal treatment for certain teeth
- Removal of the soft inner part of the tooth (pulp) for infected baby teeth
- Pulling teeth
- Dentures, partial dentures
- Space maintainers for children with missing teeth
- Some orthodontic care for children
- Some specialty care for surgical centers for care under general anesthesia
- Emergency exams for acute onset of pain
- Crowns (porcelain and porcelain-to-metal crowns for certain populations)

Important Information

- Always take your [Medicaid member card](#) and dental plan card (if applicable) to each appointment
- Use a [dentist who accepts Medicaid or is on your dental plan network](#)
- Keep your appointment or cancel at least 24-hours in advance
- Some dental services need a prior authorization. Your dentist will need to get permission before you can be treated

Moving forward

Building on success and protecting what's been built

Utah Medicaid, UUSOD, and its partners will:

- Continue to educate members and recruit dentists
- Conduct ongoing research to demonstrate impact
- Explore integrating the pediatric Medicaid dental program to create a more streamlined system



Lessons for other states

Although Utah's model isn't easily replicable, the principles behind its success offer valuable insights for other states exploring adult Medicaid dental expansion:

- Creative financing
- Incrementalism with intent
- Institutional Leadership and Trust
- Provider-Centered Design

Utah's 'secret sauce' for achieving extensive Medicaid adult dental benefits was institutional innovation paired with strategic patience: a state dental school willing to eliminate fiscal barriers, conservative lawmakers who valued pragmatic solutions over ideological positions, and a decade-long commitment to proving the model worked before scaling it statewide.

Q&A

