

August 3, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Wyden  
Chairman, Finance Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Chairman, Energy and Commerce Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Richard Neal  
Chairman, Ways and Means Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Chairmen Wyden, Pallone, and Neal:

**We are writing to urge you to strengthen Medicare for America's older adults and people with disabilities by adding dental coverage to Part B.**

Health care is a key determinant of economic stability, improved social connectedness, and overall wellness. For far too long, our health care system has made it far too difficult for far too many Americans to get the care and medicine they need. Older adults and people with disabilities have been hit especially hard not only by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also by gaps in Medicare coverage that make important health care unaffordable and out of reach.

**The Oral Health Pandemic Response Workgroup** – a group of oral health industry executives, clinical professionals, public health experts, advocates and community members – **urges President Biden and Congress to take two critical actions to strengthen Medicare** and ensure that the over 60 million American seniors and people with disabilities have access to essential health care:

- 1. Strengthen Medicare by including dental, vision, and hearing coverage to Part B**
- 2. Pair and pay for this expansion with robust Medicare drug price negotiation provisions**

**Medicare's lack of an oral health benefit means that two-thirds of all enrollees – [more than 37 million Americans](#) – do not have dental coverage.** These are disproportionately Black, Indigenous, Hispanic and other people of color, those with disabilities, and those living in rural communities who are left without a way to afford the care they need to maintain health and well-being. For example, in the last year seven out of 10 Black Medicare enrollees and six out of 10 Hispanic enrollees did not see a dentist, and 20 percent of rural seniors have not seen a dentist in more than five years. This disproportionate lack of access to care can have serious consequences. One [study](#) showed that almost half of American Indians and Alaska Natives aged 65 or older had untreated tooth decay, compared to 19% of that age group for the U.S. as a whole.

**Adding a comprehensive dental benefit to Medicare Part B would not only improve equity, access and health outcomes, it would also reduce health care costs over the long-term.** For example, [one study](#) found that health care costs were reduced an average of \$1,037 per person for people with chronic conditions when they were provided with preventive dental care.

The Congressional Budget Office has [projected](#) an estimated \$456B in federal savings from negotiating prescription drug prices in Medicare. Adopting this provision would serve two purposes: ensuring that millions more people can afford their medicines; and enabling Congress to invest in improvements to Medicare, including the addition of comprehensive dental coverage, to keep people healthy and costs down.

**These two actions have strong bipartisan support.** In a recent Morning Consult/Politico [poll](#), 84% of all voters – 89% of Democrats and 79% of Republicans – favored adding dental, vision and hearing coverage to Medicare. The same poll shows that three-quarters of all Democrats (78%) and the majority of Republicans (56%) support empowering the federal government to negotiate lower prices of brand-name prescription drugs covered by Medicare. Also, a 2018 survey conducted by the American Dental Association’s Health Policy Institute found that 71.2 percent of dentists agree that Medicare should include a comprehensive dental benefit. Medicare dental coverage constructed within a regulatory framework supportive of provider participation, including adequate reimbursement rates, would benefit consumers and industry alike.

**Now is the time to provide much-needed relief for millions of Americans. Authorizing negotiations for Medicare drug prices and strengthening Medicare Part B by covering dental, vision, and hearing benefits will prevent suffering and financial hardship for families across the nation.**

Together, we can create a more affordable and equitable health care system. Thank you for your support for this critical issue.

Respectfully,

The **Oral Health Pandemic Response Workgroup** is an ad hoc gathering of executives across the dental landscape. We represent providers, dental plans, dental service organizations, dental practices, payers, dental supply manufacturers, state dental boards, community clinics, the public health community, government, academia, philanthropy, advocates, and members of the community.

American Dental Hygienists’ Association

[ADHA](#) is the largest national organization representing the professional interests of more than 226,000 dental hygienists across the country.

Arcora Foundation

[Arcora Foundation](#) is the largest state-based foundation dedicated to improving oral health. Arcora Foundation works to prevent oral disease, expand access to care and integrate oral health into overall health, through grantmaking, policy advocacy and systems change, and partnerships.

Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors

[ASTDD](#), whose membership of more than 500 includes the chief dental public health officers of every U.S. state and territory, formulates and promotes the establishment national dental public health policy, assists state and territorial dental programs to develop and implement programs and policies to prevent oral diseases, strengthens dental public

health professionals' knowledge and skills, and provides information on oral health to health officials and policymakers.

#### California Pan-Ethnic Health Network

[CPEHN](#) mobilizes communities of color across California to advocate for public policies that advance health equity and improve health outcomes. We bring together state and local organizations that represent people of color, immigrants, refugees, youth, and LGBTQ+ communities.

#### CareQuest Institute for Oral Health

[CareQuest Institute for Oral Health](#) is a national nonprofit championing a more equitable future where every person can reach their full potential through excellent health. We collaborate with thought leaders, health care providers, patients, and local, state, and federal stakeholders, to accelerate oral health care transformation and create a system designed for everyone.

#### Community Catalyst

[Community Catalyst](#) is a leading non-profit national health advocacy organization dedicated to advancing a movement for health equity and justice. They partner with local, state and national advocates to leverage and build power so all people can influence decisions that affect their health.

#### Hispanic Dental Association

The [HDA](#) provides service, education, research, advocacy, and leadership to its 8,500 members with the aim of promoting overall health, increasing oral health equity, and improving health care quality for Hispanic/Latinx and other underrepresented populations.

#### National Dental Association

The [NDA](#) promotes oral health equity among people of color by harnessing the collective power of its more than 7,000 members, advocating for the needs of and mentoring dental students of color, and raising the profile of the profession in our communities. The NDA is comprised of 39 state and local chapters representing over 30 million Black Americans, and is working to expand its membership to include oral health care professionals around the globe. The NDA is the parent organization of the National Dental Association Foundation, Student National Dental Association, National Dental Hygienists Association, National Dental Assistants Association and Auxiliary National Dental Association.

#### National Dental Hygienists' Association

The [NDHA](#) is a membership organization for licensed minority dental hygienists and minority dental hygiene students. The NDHA is committed to cultivating and promoting the art and science of dental hygiene. The members of NDHA are especially active in the efforts to enhance access to oral healthcare for the under-served communities.

#### National Indian Health Board

The [NIHB](#) was established by the Tribes to advocate as the united voice of the 574 federally recognized American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes. In this role, the NIHB seeks to reinforce Tribal sovereignty, strengthen Tribal health systems, secure resources, and build capacity to achieve the highest level of health and well-being for our People.

#### National Rural Health Association

[NRHA](#), a national association with more than 21,000 members, provides leadership on rural health issues through advocacy, communications, education and research.

#### Oral Health Progress and Equity Network

[OPEN](#), a national network with more than 2,500 grassroots, grass middle and grass top members, seeks to ignite change and leverage collective power to integrate oral health into overall health and ensure that health care is equitable, accessible, and affordable for all.

#### Project Accessible Oral Health

[PAOH](#) is a global public-private partnership bringing together dental and medical professionals, corporations, policymakers, educators, people with disabilities, caregivers, and other stakeholders in pursuit of equal access to culturally competent oral healthcare for the disability community.

### Santa Fe Group

The [Santa Fe Group](#) is an action-oriented think tank with a passion to improve lives through oral health. Since its inception 25 years ago, the Santa Fe Group has been instrumental as a neutral convener, communicator, connector and catalyst to move the needle on critical issues impacting the oral health and thereby overall health of all Americans.

### Others who support this request

Bruce Donoff, DMD, MD, FACS, FACD

Dr. Donoff is a former Dean of Harvard School of Dental Medicine

### Families USA

[Families USA](#) is a leading national, non-partisan voice for health care consumers dedicated to achieving high-quality, affordable health care and improved health for all.