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CA STATE SENATOR • 10TH DISTRICT



Senate Bill 980: The Smile Act

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SUMMARY

The Smile Act aligns law with regulations regarding crowns, and ensures dental implants are a covered benefit under Medi-Cal.

BACKGROUND

First, in order to qualify for Medi-Cal, a family must be at 138% of the poverty level. According to the Department of Health Care Services, about one-third of California's population is enrolled in Medi-Cal. Medi-Cal currently provides a core set of health benefits, including doctor visits, hospital care, immunization, pregnancy-related services, and nursing home care. Further, it also offers comprehensive preventative and restorative dental benefits to both children and adults.

However, a 2022 California Health Interview Survey found that 61.6% of adults reported fair to poor condition of teeth or no natural teeth.

Data from the 2016 California Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey found that 15% of California's rural seniors have had all of their teeth pulled due to decay or gum disease, as compared to 8% of non-rural seniors.

Current Medi-Cal regulations provide crowns to patients ages 13 and over, but the law only provides for ages 21 and over.

ISSUE

Although Medi-Cal offers a comprehensive list of free or low-cost services to its recipients, per the Medi-Cal 2024 Provider Handbook, **dental implants “are not a benefit of the Medi-Cal Dental Program.” In order for patients to request a dental implant, they have to have an exceptional medical condition** like: cancer of

the mouth; severe loss of upper and lower jaw bone; skeletal deformities; or traumatic destruction of jaw, face or head ([Medi-Cal Dental Provider Handbook 2024, page 113](#)). However, for anyone else who may need an implant, they have to pay for it out of pocket. Families on Medi-Cal are already at the poverty threshold, so they have no financial means to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket for a dental procedure that should be a covered benefit under Medi-Cal.

Oral health is the foundation of overall health. The lack of accessible dental services across California means everyday Californians who are suffering from less dire, but no less significant, dental issues are simply having teeth removed without having that tooth replaced.

This leads to an overall deterioration in physical health, mental health, and social well-being, which creates cost pressures on our health systems.

SOLUTION

SB 980 aligns existing law to regulation regarding crowns, and ensures implants are a covered benefit under Medi-Cal.

By expanding oral healthcare benefits, we also ensure greater long-term health care gains, which will alleviate pressures on our healthcare system.

SUPPORT

California Alliance for Retired Americans (Sponsor)
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