

An Act increasing access to MassHealth dental providers

Bill Number:
H.1401/S.888

Lead Sponsors:
Rep. Phillips & Sen. Mark

This bill creates a pilot program in 10 cities and towns to provide incentive payments to dental providers who treat an additional 10 MassHealth members per year.

What does this legislation do?

- Establishes an incentive payment on a per-member-per visit basis to dental providers who see at least 10 additional *adult* MassHealth members each year.
- The payments would be made available on a pilot basis in 10 municipalities with a high share of MassHealth members but low use of dental services.
- This proposal builds on the MassHealth rural add-on payments available to dental providers in rural counties and efforts in other states such as [Colorado](#).

Why is this legislation needed?

- Oral health is a critical component of overall health, yet dental services remain out of reach for many residents. In Massachusetts, dental care is the [most common unmet health care need](#) due to costs.
- MassHealth members, in particular, often struggle to find providers that accept their insurance and face long wait times that exacerbate existing oral health needs.
 - Less than half ([44%](#)) of Massachusetts dentists accept MassHealth, compared with [73%](#) of primary care physicians.
 - Of dentists accepting MassHealth, almost half ([47%](#)) did not see any MassHealth patients in the past year.
- In 2019, barriers to routine dental care resulted in nearly [30,000](#) costly and preventable visits to emergency departments in Massachusetts.
- Poor oral health contributes to a wide range of negative health outcomes including challenges with managing chronic conditions like [diabetes](#), [adverse](#) pregnancy and [surgical](#) outcomes, and even [memory loss](#).

Why is this a health equity issue?

- Access to oral health care is fundamentally an issue of health equity. Black and Hispanic/Latino families are [more likely](#) to have unmet needs for medical or dental care, and Black and Hispanic/Latino Americans are most likely to face [cost barriers](#) to dental care.
- [MassHealth members](#), [people of color](#), and [people with disabilities](#) are more likely to visit the emergency department for preventable oral health needs.