



MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT
Codify Medicaid Dental Coverage Expansions
A.8983 (Paulin)/S.7667 (Cleare)
May 7, 2024

The Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) strongly supports A.8983 (Paulin)/S.7667 (Cleare) to codify *Ciaramella v. McDonald* to ensure millions of New Yorkers on Medicaid will have equitable access to comprehensive, affordable dental care.

The Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) is the primary care association representing all of New York's federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), also known as community health centers (CHCs). CHCs serve more than 2.3 million New Yorkers at nearly 900 sites each year. Among CHC patients: 89% live below 200% of the Federal poverty level, 68% are Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC), 28% speak limited or no English, 12% are uninsured, more than 4% are unhoused, and 68% are enrolled in Medicaid, CHIP, or are dually enrolled in Medicare and Medicaid.

Prior to 2023,¹ New York did not provide Medicaid coverage for molar root canals and crowns, instead requiring people to have teeth pulled that could have been treated and saved. For instance, if an individual had a tooth infection and was presented with the option to do a root canal to preserve an infected tooth or remove the infected tooth, Medicaid would only cover the latter procedure. In addition, once a person lost approximately half of their teeth and less than four pairs of teeth in the back of their mouth that touch, New York would then provide removable dentures that can only be replaced every 8 years if there is an issue. Dental implants were not covered at all by Medicaid.

Adequate dental care is critical to overall health and well-being. Studies show that poor oral health has serious implications on an individual's overall health and well-being, such as higher risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease,² higher levels of unemployment, poor nutrition, and social isolation. Consequently, in 2018, the Legal Aid Society sued the NYS Department of Health on behalf of Medicaid recipients who were denied dental coverage for procedures not considered medically necessary and won.

In a historic settlement announced May 1, 2023, in *Ciaramella v. McDonald*,³ New York Medicaid must now cover root canals, crowns, replacement dentures, and dental implants when medically necessary, thus ending the practice of pulling teeth that can be saved with treatment – but this is only for four years and is not binding in statute. Recognizing that the expanded dental coverage can have a profound positive impact on overall health and well-being, such expansion should not be limited to just the next 4 years and should be codified to ensure expanded dental access and advance health equity.

CHCANYS strongly urges the New York State Legislature to pass A.8983/S.7667 to codify Medicaid dental coverage expansions, thereby increasing access to preventive dental care and promoting positive oral health outcomes and overall well-being.

For more information, contact Marie Mongeon, Vice President of Policy: mmongeon@chcanys.org.

¹ <http://health.wnyc.com/health/entry/210/>

² <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31560644/>

³ <http://health.wnyc.com/health/news/91/>