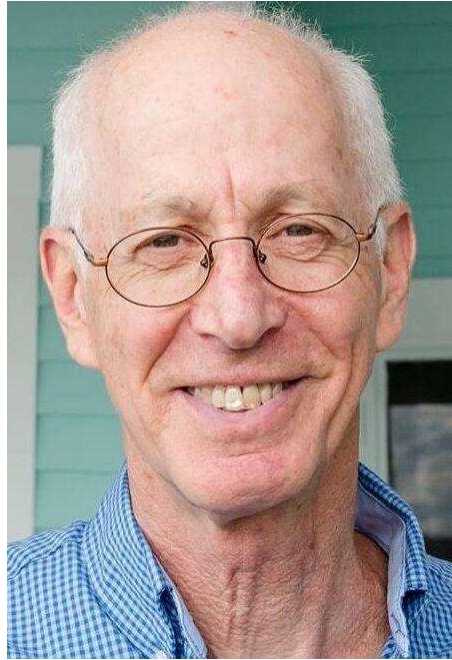


https://www.unionleader.com/opinion/op-eds/sen-cindy-rosenwald-rep-joe-schapiro-essential-dental-care-soon-to-be-a-part-of/article_9fd88ff0-b2c5-5399-9318-f1e1b16877cc.html

Sen. Cindy Rosenwald & Rep. Joe Schapiro: Essential dental care soon to be a part of Medicaid

Jul 5, 2022






Rep. Joe Schapiro

IT'S BEEN a long time coming, but Democrats in the state Senate and House have persevered. By this time next year, adult Granite Staters enrolled in Medicaid will finally have access to a full range of essential dental care.

Until now, Medicaid recipients — including nursing home residents, individuals with developmental disabilities, and other low-income adults, many working at low-paying jobs without benefits — have not been able to afford routine oral health care. There has been no coverage for cleanings, diagnostic exams, X-rays, restorative treatment, or oral surgery. In fact, the only choice for someone with a painful toothache has been to visit the emergency room and have their tooth extracted. There has been no coverage for the root cause of the problem.



For more than 15 years, dental professionals, legislators, advocates, and community members have worked diligently to expand dental coverage for Medicaid recipients. Developmental disability advocates, as well as members of the DD community, provided hours of compelling testimony. Dental professionals have provided millions of dollars of uncompensated care. The Department of Health and Human Services working group composed of DHHS Medicaid and dental experts, dentists, insurers, and legislators worked for years to develop a detailed plan.

Democrats in Concord have long understood that good oral health equals good overall health. There is a high correlation between dental disease and diabetes as well as heart disease. Those individuals with compromised teeth and chronic pain are unable to obtain adequate nutrition. And for those who need medication for chronic tooth pain, there is a high risk for addiction.

We understand that good oral health is directly related to a person's ability to obtain and retain good, sustainable employment. Dental disease and/or the absence of teeth make it almost impossible to obtain a job, and illness and pain make it difficult to keep one.

Twice over the past two years Republicans have blocked proposed Medicaid dental benefits. In 2020, Gov. Chris Sununu vetoed legislation and last year House Republicans removed an appropriation for a dental plan from the budget. They claimed that it was too expensive despite evidence that it would create significant savings in emergency room visits and in the cost of treating other illnesses exacerbated by oral disease.

Democrats in the House and Senate refused to give up. Persistence, tireless advocacy from community members, and a willingness to compromise have resulted in unanimous support in the Senate and a broad bipartisan majority in the House in support of two identical bills. Finally, this year

Gov. Sununu signed the benefit into law. New Hampshire now joins the ranks of 35 other states that provide comprehensive dental care to adult Medicaid recipients.

Not only will tens of thousands of low-income adults benefit from dental coverage, but our economy as a whole will benefit. We will see less public expense for emergency medical care and improved employment prospects for enrollees. To put it simply, this is a good policy for the people of New Hampshire and a good policy for our workforce and the economy.

Sen. Cindy Rosenwald (D-Nashua) represents Senate District 13 and Rep. Joe Schapiro (D-Keene) represents Cheshire - District 16