

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS

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THE ISSUE

With the most recent transition to managed care in northeastern Pennsylvania, almost the entire state is now under Health Choices, and Medical Assistance (MA) providers are experiencing many more administrative barriers that impact their businesses and ability to treat MA patients in a timely fashion. Additionally, the recent elimination of some services for adults is detrimental to their overall health and more costly for taxpayers in the long run.

TAKE ACTION



- ▶ Talk to your representative and senator about the need to pass meaningful reforms to the state's MA program. Encourage them to work with PDA to introduce legislation to correct existing barriers to provider participation.
- ▶ Ask them to reach out to Administration officials and communicate their support for PDA's recommendations on reforming the system.

- ▶ PDA is committed to improving access to care for patients enrolled in the Medical Assistance (MA) program. But increasing overhead costs, inadequate reimbursement rates and administrative hurdles make it difficult for dentists to become MA providers.

The state should conduct an annual review and increase provider reimbursement rates to reflect fair market value, in order to improve participation in the MA program. Most dentists are small business owners with high overhead costs, and they cannot afford to treat MA patients at fees that are sometimes as low as 25 percent of the actual cost.

- ▶ PDA urges the state to fully fund the adult MA program. The recent decision to limit most essential services for adults will result in increased cost to taxpayers when adults do not get the services they need and eventually seek treatment in hospital emergency rooms. PDA requests that the state reverse its decision to:

- Limit an examination and cleaning to one every 180 days.
- Eliminate coverage for crowns.
- Eliminate coverage for endodontics.
- Eliminate coverage for periodontal services.
- Allow one denture per lifetime, regardless of procedure code used.

These cuts apply to MA patients who are 21 years of age and older. There is a benefit exception process available to some patients who meet certain criteria. Adults who reside in nursing facilities or intermediate care facilities are exempt.

According to a new study in the *Journal of the American Dental Association*, emergency department visits for dental problems cost nearly \$3 billion during the period from 2008 to 2010.

- ▶ The legislature should require centralized credentialing of providers to avoid duplication and delays. Requiring the Administration to establish a centralized system for dental managed care organizations will allow providers to enroll on a timely basis. PDA has heard from members who have waited more than six months to be credentialed. This delay is costly to some who were waiting to be hired by a clinic or as an associate in a practice treating MA patients. A simplified credentialing process in which providers may simultaneously credential with several companies will alleviate providers' frustrations and ensure continuity of care for patients. It also will reduce administrative costs for both the carriers and providers.



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STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT FOR DENTISTS PRACTICING IN HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SHORTAGE AREAS

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THE ISSUE #DAYONTHEHILL

Governor Corbett's budget proposal includes expanding access to primary care services in underserved areas by increasing the funding for the state's health practitioner loan forgiveness program by \$4 million. The funding would be used to offer loan repayment to an additional 70 physicians, dentists and other primary care practitioners who agree to serve a certain number of years in designated health professional shortage areas.

Currently, the Department of Health's health care practitioner loan forgiveness program reimburses a maximum of \$64,000 for up to four years commitment from a dentist to practice in a designated health professional shortage area. The program is only open to general dentists and currently only five dentists participate. They practice in Blair, Bradford, Clearfield, Schuylkill and Tioga counties.

In 2013, Pennsylvania had a total of 72 designated dental health professional shortage areas (DHPSAs):

- 46 population DHPSAs (*population group within a defined geographic area*)
- 21 facility DHPSAs (*specific public or non-profit facility, such as a prison*)
- 5 geographic DHPSAs (*distinct geographic area, such as a county or grouping of census tracts, townships or boroughs*).

TAKE ACTION #DAYONTHEHILL

- ▶ Talk to your representative and senator about the need to increase funding in the Department of Health's health practitioner loan forgiveness program, which has proven successful in bringing health care providers to underserved areas. Ask them to support the Governor's proposal and to include a funding increase in the budget.



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TALKING POINTS ON STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT

- ▶ More than 90 percent of dental students graduate with debt. The debt amount varies greatly depending on whether students attend a public or private school.
- ▶ According to the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), the cost of student loan debt has grown 66 percent in the last 10 years and the average debt for dental school graduates is almost \$241,000. More than 75 percent of students graduate with more than \$100,000 in student loans.

There are two overriding concerns related to the cost of dental education. One is that the rising educational costs and indebtedness may make a dental career appear unaffordable and unattractive to prospective students. The second is that an increase in student debt will prevent new graduates from treating low-income patients because they can't accept such low reimbursement rates.

- ▶ The state's health care practitioner loan forgiveness program provides loan repayment up to \$64,000 for four years of service in a shortage area.
- ▶ This amount is woefully inadequate given the amount of debt most dental students accumulate.

PDA supports Governor Corbett's proposal to increase funding in the state's program by \$4 million and to award 70 more slots to dentists and other health care providers who apply for loan forgiveness in exchange for practicing in a shortage area.

- ▶ Increasing funds in the state's health practitioner loan repayment program improves access to dental care by influencing the location of some dental practices. The majority of dentists are small business owners. New dentists with enormous debt will take advantage of financial incentives such as an increase in student loan repayment.

Increasing funds in the health practitioner loan forgiveness program will help new dental graduates who want to practice in underserved areas but feel they must practice in more affluent areas of the state in order to establish a solid patient base and to more quickly pay off their loans.

- ▶ Loan repayment has proven successful in strengthening a community's overall economy. It encourages dental school graduates to practice in underserved areas, increasing the workforce by employing hygienists and assistants and others who have difficulty finding employment.

There are 72 designated dental shortage areas and only five dentists enrolled in the loan forgiveness program. PDA would like to increase the number of slots available to dentists.

