



OPEN is made up of individuals and organizations from across the nation taking on America's oral health challenges. We look forward to working with members of Congress to make good oral health a reality for everyone.

What Can Congress Do?

▶ Action 1: Improve access to dental care for veterans.

- The majority of veterans do not qualify for VA dental benefits, and those who do often face provider shortages, geographic barriers, and high out-of-pocket costs, placing them at greater risk for chronic conditions and financial strain.
- Expanding access is not only critical for improving veterans' health, but also a cost-saving investment: Treating gum disease among just 25% of veterans could save nearly \$3 billion annually in consequential treatment of heart disease and diabetes, with savings rising to nearly \$6 billion at 50% utilization.¹

▶ Action 2: Protect access to essential oral health care by maintaining stable Medicaid funding.

- Medicaid is a vital source of dental coverage for children, people with disabilities, and low-income adults and seniors — improving health outcomes, reducing medical debt, and boosting economic opportunity and job performance.
- Proposed changes under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) could unintentionally limit access to dental services, leading to increased emergency room use and higher system-wide health care costs.

▶ Action 3: Ensure oral health is represented in federal agencies.

- Millions of Americans rely on the CDC's State Promotion of Strategies to Advance Oral Health awards, which fund states' oral health programs. For decades, this infrastructure has enabled the tracking and surveillance of dental disease, informed evidence-based policymaking, supported state and local prevention efforts, and advanced innovative workforce models to expand access to care.
- Recent rollbacks include the elimination of the CDC's Division of Oral Health, which administers these grants, as well as the removal of HRSA's Chief Dental Officer role, reductions in NIH-supported oral health research, and the currently vacant Chief Dental Officer role at CMS.

References

1. The American Institute of Dental Public Health and CareQuest Institute for Oral Health, Veteran Dental Care Stimulates the Economy and Improves Overall Health, Boston, MA: April 2022.

