

Veterans Need Affordable Dental Care



Despite the essential role of oral health in overall well-being, millions of veterans are not able to get the dental care they need to stay healthy.

Of the more than 9 million veterans who are eligible for medical care through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), only 26% are also eligible for dental care.¹ Of the veterans who are eligible for VA dental care, only about one third use it annually, including through the Community Care Network (CCN). Significant barriers to care, such as burdensome eligibility requirements, limited provider availability, and complex administrative processes, prevent many veterans from accessing the services to which they're entitled. As a result, veterans face significant dental needs, increasing risk for preventable health complications.

Lack of Dental Care Results in More Health Problems and Higher Costs

Veterans face significant oral health challenges that contribute to broader health and financial burdens.

- **More likely to lose their teeth:** When teeth are severely decayed, or the gums surrounding them are infected due to periodontal disease, extraction may be necessary. Older US veterans (ages 60+) are much more likely to have had at least six teeth removed (31%) compared to older nonveterans (20%).²
- **More likely to seek emergency dental treatment:** Veterans are more than twice as likely (7.7%) as nonveterans (3.0%) to seek care at a hospital emergency department for an oral health condition.² Emergency departments are not well equipped to treat dental issues, and visits like these typically only occur when people are in pain but do not have anywhere else to get treated.

Steps to Strengthen Dental Access for Veterans

- **Broaden VA Dental Eligibility:** Support H.R.210, the *Dental Care for Veterans Act*, which would make dental care a standard benefit for all veterans enrolled in the US Department of Veterans Affairs health system. 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.³
- **Ensure Pilot Programs Improve Access for Veterans:** Congress should ensure existing VA dental pilot programs are implemented effectively and increase access to care for targeted veteran populations.



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By addressing barriers to affordable dental care, policymakers can improve access to necessary care for veterans while reducing long-term health care costs associated with poor oral health.



References

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