

Fact Sheet



Supporting maternal and infant health by improving oral health coverage in pregnancy

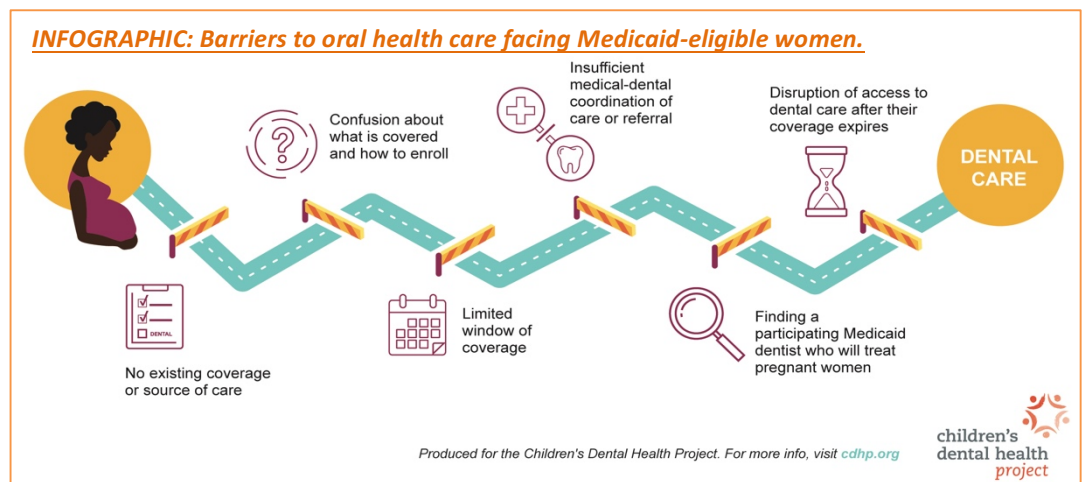
Oral health is essential to a woman's overall health, the health of her pregnancy, and it can affect her family's financial stability. Congress can promote healthy pregnancies and place infants on a path to success by making oral health care a mandatory component of pregnancy-related coverage in Medicaid.

In pregnancy and after birth, a mother's oral health has far-reaching impacts:

- **Ensuring good oral health may reduce pregnancy complications.** Evidence suggests that women with gum disease may be at greater risk for serious health conditions like pre-eclampsia, giving birth too soon, or having low birth-weight babies.¹ Gum disease may also worsen the harm of depression on pregnancy.²
- **When mom has good oral health, children are better able to grow up healthy, setting them up to succeed.** Kids are three times more likely to face dental disease if their mother couldn't get needed dental care in pregnancy.³ That can limit a child's ability to eat, sleep, play, and learn. Children suffering from tooth decay are four times more likely to earn lower grades in school.⁴
- **Supporting pregnant women's and parents' good oral health boosts family financial security.** Women with good oral health earn 4.5% more than their peers.⁵ This boost makes a real difference for families, especially in households where mothers are the sole or primary breadwinner. As six in 10 low-wage adults lacking dental coverage report their oral health impedes job prospects, helping parents and other adults address their dental needs can boost employment and family incomes.⁶

Experts in medicine and dentistry agree on the importance of dental care in pregnancy. A federally-facilitated panel produced a National Consensus Statement on the issue in 2012.⁷ In 2013, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists affirmed, "ample evidence shows that oral health care during pregnancy is safe and should be recommended to improve the oral and general health of the woman."⁸

Policy gaps act as roadblocks for many pregnant women in need of care. Such hurdles are most profound for those who are enrolled in or eligible for public coverage like Medicaid.



Every person should be able to achieve their dreams without poor oral health holding them back. To achieve a more just and equitable society, we must ensure that pregnant women and new mothers have access to comprehensive and affordable oral health coverage and care.

Federal action is needed to improve oral health coverage for low-wage pregnant women:

The dental coverage landscape for low-wage pregnant women and adults of child-bearing age is a confusing patchwork. While states are required to provide comprehensive oral health care to children in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), dental benefits for adults are optional. As a result, coverage options and rules vary widely from state to state, pushing even basic dental care out of reach of many pregnant women.

- Currently, **only 19 states** offer extensive dental benefits to adults enrolled in Medicaid.⁹ Even then, some programs place frequency or dollar limits on certain services.
- States also provide pregnancy-related services to eligible women. They can be more generous than Medicaid benefits offered to income-eligible adults. For example, Virginia now provides comprehensive dental coverage to pregnant women enrolled in Medicaid, while other adults enrolled in Medicaid have less access to oral health care.
- The income eligibility limit for pregnancy-related services must be at least 138% of the federal poverty level (FPL) — \$16,753 for an individual. States can set higher eligibility limits, with some exceeding 300% FPL.¹⁰ *Still, there is no federal requirement that Medicaid cover oral health as part of pregnancy-related benefits.*

What Congress can do today:

Congress can act now to ensure that any woman eligible for pregnancy-related coverage in Medicaid can access comprehensive oral health care as part of services necessary to promote healthy pregnancies. In 2019, two bills were introduced — the **MOMMAs Act (HR 1897/S916)** and the **MOMMIES Act (HR 2602/S1343)** — that would require oral health coverage for pregnant and postpartum women in Medicaid and CHIP as part of broader efforts to address our nation’s maternal mortality crisis. By championing these and similar proposals, Congress can put both mother and child on the right track from birth and take steps toward oral health for all.

End Notes

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