



ORAL HEALTH *is essential health!*

Our mouths are important. Every time we smile, frown, talk, or eat, we use our mouths and teeth. Our mouths and teeth help us communicate with the world around us and allow us to nourish and support our bodies. Our mouths play such an important role in our ability to not only survive but thrive and enjoy our lives to the fullest.

The mouth is called the gateway to the body and research has shown that oral health is a core part of our overall health, shaping our wellbeing at every age. Dental disease can harm our heart, and lungs, complicate diabetes, and even impact our cognitive abilities as we age. Good oral health is also important in ensuring healthy pregnancies and thriving children as untreated dental disease may lead to complications such as preeclampsia—a potentially fatal blood pressure condition, preterm delivery, and lower birth weight babies. Additionally, children are much more likely to have cavities if their birth parent has untreated cavities or tooth loss and are much more likely to miss school due to mouth pain.

Oral health is more than just a pretty smile. Where good oral health can support thriving communities and a thriving economy, dental disease threatens the health and security of children, families, and communities. In fact, adults with good oral health may have more job opportunities than their peers with dental disease. Poor oral health can also impact mental health as one factor leading to depression and low self-confidence.

In Arizona, over two million adults over the age of 21 who participate in AHCCCS do not have a dental benefit for preventative dental services. Oral health benefits in Arizona are reserved for emergencies and capped at \$1,000, with very few exceptions. This leaves many Arizonans with costly visits to emergency departments as their sole treatment option, many times leading to the removal of teeth for preventable dental conditions. Recent research shows that offering a comprehensive dental benefit could reduce emergency department utilization in Arizona and save the state millions of dollars each year.

Oral health is also about social justice. In Arizona, access to oral health care is often determined by a person's age, income level, and the community to which they belong. Arizona's Black, Indigenous, and Brown people (BIPOC), as well as people with low incomes, face the steepest barriers to good oral health, and cost is cited as the predominant reason for being unable to visit a dentist. Due to this, BIPOC and Arizonans with lower incomes often have higher rates of tooth decay than white and wealthier Arizonans, further risking their health and financial security.

Luckily, nearly all dental disease is preventable with the right support and good oral health for all Arizonans is possible. It is for these reasons that the Arizona Oral Health Coalition and below signatories will continue our legislative efforts to secure an AHCCCS adult dental benefit (inclusive of a dental benefit for pregnant and postpartum people) as such a benefit would allow all Arizonans to access vital dental services and would save the state money by preventing costly health complications caused or exacerbated by poor oral health.

Sincerely,
Arizona Oral Health Coalition

TAKE ACTION NOW!

AZ  **HC**
Arizona Oral Health Coalition