

# Fix Access to Dental Medicaid in North Carolina



**NORTH CAROLINA**  
DENTAL SOCIETY.

## The Ask

Support HB60, Modernize Medicaid Dental Rates which would increase dental Medicaid reimbursement rates for child and adult services by 30%.

## The Issue

In December 2023, North Carolina expanded Medicaid to include 600,000 more people, many of whom will struggle to get care. That's because the provider network is in crisis. The cost of providing dental services continues to rise, but Medicaid reimbursement rates are at the same level as in 2008, forcing dentists to limit the number of Medicaid patients they can treat.

## Why Raising Rates is Critical

Poor oral health is associated with poor systemic health, including diabetes, dementia, heart disease, stroke, and colon cancer. Increasing reimbursement rates could strengthen the provider network and improve access to care for both children and adults.

Without dental providers, patients turn to emergency departments, where they're often given opioids to treat the pain, but the underlying dental problems remain. Plus, hospital visits cost the state more money. Since many newly insured patients have never had dental care, they will likely need significant treatment, which will put an added strain on an already fragile provider network.

## The Reality

- In 2019, 1.8 million ER visits were for non-traumatic dental conditions (NTDCs), costing the state \$3.4 billion, or about \$1,887 per visit.\*
- The top NTDCs from 2019 to 2021 (decay, toothache, and infection) likely could have been prevented with dental exams.\*
- Between 2010 and 2020, ER visits in rural settings were more likely to be NTDCs compared to those in urban areas.\*
- While Medicaid reimbursement rates are the same as in 2008, prices have risen 46% since that time, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics consumer price index.

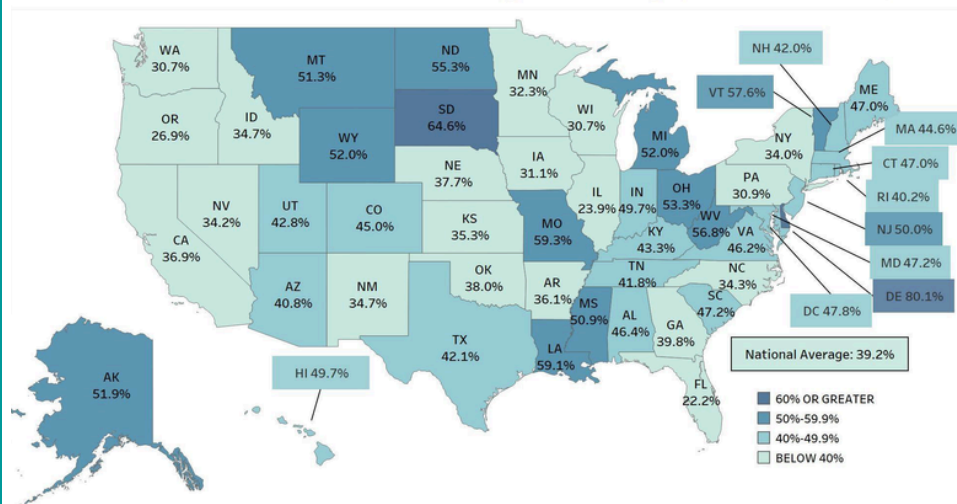
*Journal of the American Dental Association, The Most Common Types of Non-Traumatic Dental Conditions among ER Visits in NC Before & During the Covid-19 Pandemic, 2024*

NC ranks in the **bottom third** of the nation's Medicaid programs when it comes to reimbursement as a percentage of private insurance payments for child services.

American Dental Association's Health Policy Institute, 2020

**States of similar socioeconomic status have increased Medicaid funding by 30% to 40% in the past two years, including Virginia and Louisiana.**

Medicaid FFS Reimbursement as a Percent of Average Dentist Charges, Child Dental Services, 2024



# Access & Sustainability

## NC Medicaid in Crisis – Facts & Figures

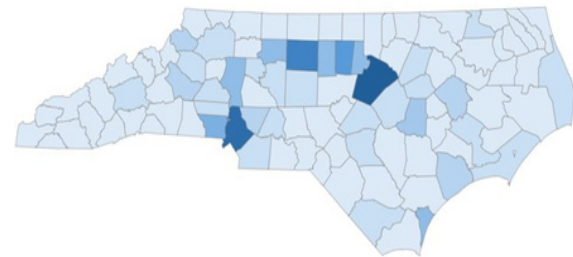


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Endodontists, periodontists, and oral surgeons are almost non-existent in the Medicaid network due to low payments for the vital care they provide. Many Medicaid beneficiaries who have complex dental needs must travel great distances and experience longer-than-average wait times for an appointment to receive specialty care.

Oral Surgeons in NC Accepting Medicaid by County

Total # of Practices by County 0 7.5 15



“The North Carolina Institute of Medicine’s Task Force on Oral Health Transformation supports increasing Medicaid provider reimbursement rates to improve access and quality of oral health care.”

– **Michelle G. Ries, MPH, President & CEO, NCIOM**

*The North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NICOM) was founded in 1983 by the North Carolina General Assembly to serve as a source of non-partisan information and analysis to promote effective health policies focused on improving the health and well-being of all North Carolinians.*

### Greater Network

Reduce the strain on the understaffed general, pediatric, and specialty provider network by enticing more providers to accept Medicaid’s new reimbursement levels.

### Travel Time

Increased provider participation means **less** travel time for families who need routine and specialty dental care.

### Reimbursement

Increase Medicaid dental reimbursement rates. This first step creates a **positive** flow.

### ER Visits

**Eliminate** expensive recurrent emergency hospital visits and opioid solutions for acute dental complaints and ensure the root cause of the pain is addressed.

### The Ultimate Win

**Improve** access to care for all Medicaid-eligible individuals, including children and those with special health care needs.

**IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:**



**NC ORAL HEALTH**  
COLLABORATIVE

