

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

December 10, 2021

The Honorable Charles S. Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Schumer,

Thanks to your leadership, the Build Back Better Act promises to be the most significant investment in health equity and access to health care since the passage of the Affordable Care Act. Through provisions such as those to extend Medicaid coverage to one year postpartum and close the Medicaid coverage gap, this legislation stands to address longstanding inequities in access to health care. However, the legislation does not address one of the starkest health inequities in the health care system. The current patchwork of adult dental coverage in the Medicaid program has devastating consequences, in particular for people with low incomes; [Black, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander](#) populations, and other people of color; [tribal communities](#); people with disabilities; and those in rural America.

We now have a unique opportunity to close a glaring gap in Medicaid coverage and ensure that every person who relies on the program receive the dental care they need, regardless of where they live. As the Build Back Better Act is considered by the Senate, **we urge you to support the addition of provisions that would make comprehensive dental care a mandatory component of Medicaid coverage for all enrolled adults while maintaining current provisions in the House-passed bill.**

Adult dental coverage is optional for state Medicaid programs. As a result, adult dental benefits vary widely across states, and some states don't cover it at all. This puts care out of reach for millions of people; further stresses underfunded [tribal health systems](#); and compounds systemic barriers to care in marginalized communities. Despite increases in health coverage nationwide, cost barriers to dental care for low-income adults have [only increased](#) in recent years, with Black and Hispanic communities reporting the highest financial hurdles to accessing the care they need. But making adult dental coverage mandatory in Medicaid can help alleviate these inequities.

Moreover, disparities in adult dental coverage are harming America's children. When parents lack dental coverage, their children are more likely to face delays in getting needed care or forego care altogether. These gaps most harm children of color and those in low-income families. However, when state Medicaid programs provide dental coverage to parents, children are [more likely](#) to get the dental care they need.

These changes are also vital for America's economy and workforce. Robust Medicaid adult dental coverage can improve [employability](#), while reducing associated racial inequities in the job market. Good oral health can also increase [wages](#) for women in the workforce. These gains could be pivotal for people recovering from pandemic unemployment, which most hurt women, tribal communities, and communities of color.

This policy is both cost-effective and popular, as evidenced by [broad support](#) for the Medicaid Dental Benefit Act (H.R. 4439). [Recent research](#) suggests that extending Medicaid adult dental benefits could lead to significant savings. With improved oral health, the policy could save at least \$273 million annually in medical costs related to diabetes, heart disease, and pregnancy. It could also lower overall state spending on dental care. In addition, greater access to dental care would reduce other unnecessary health spending, such as averting hospital emergency department visits for dental pain. This could save the U.S. health system [\\$2 billion](#) per year.

By adding Medicaid adult dental coverage to the Build Back Better Act, Congress can deliver stable and comprehensive dental coverage to all adults who count on Medicaid, no matter where they live. Doing so can continue to promote a sustainable economic recovery and to reduce vast health inequities across our country.

Sincerely,



Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress  
1st Vice-Chair, Congressional  
Hispanic Caucus



Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
Member of Congress  
Chair, Congressional Hispanic  
Caucus



Joyce Beatty  
Member of Congress  
Chair, Congressional Black  
Caucus



Robin L. Kelly  
Member of Congress  
Chair, Congressional Black  
Caucus Health Braintrust



Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress  
Chair, Congressional  
Progressive Caucus



Judy Chu  
Member of Congress  
Chair, Congressional Asian  
Pacific American Caucus