

HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS TESTIMONY
SUPPORT

SB 923 – Maryland Medical Assistance Program - Eligibility and Disenrollment

*House Health and Government Operations Committee
March 30, 2021*



Health Care for the Homeless strongly supports SB 923, which would require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide comprehensive medical and other health care services for a pregnant Program recipient for the duration of the pregnancy and for 1 year immediately following the end of the woman's pregnancy. Health Care for the Homeless also supports the amendment added in the Senate to ensure the term “health coverage” is inclusive of dental coverage.

Importance of Medicaid Expansion

Nearly 350,000—or 6%—Marylanders lack health insurance.¹ Although the Maryland General Assembly has significantly increased access to health services for Marylanders, these efforts haven't resulted in universal access to health care: employer-sponsored health coverage continues to decline, premiums continue to rise, and Maryland residents continue to lack coverage. Without routine access to primary and preventative health care, the uninsured often are diagnosed at more advanced stages of disease and, once diagnosed, tend to receive less therapeutic care. When they are sick, many have few places to turn other than costly emergency rooms – generating a bill six to 12 times the amount of a primary care visit.

The danger of sickness is even higher for women who are pregnant and post partum. An alarming increase in maternal deaths are occurring in the post partum period, up to 365 days after giving birth. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirm that roughly one-third of all pregnancy related deaths occur one week to one year after a pregnancy ends- with 12% of maternal mortality incidents occurring 43 to 365 days after pregnancy.² Extending Medicaid coverage for pregnant women to 12 months postpartum will allow women access care and address health concerns in the critical 12 months after the birth of a baby, and will greatly improve maternal health outcomes. In Medicaid expansion states, maternal mortality dropped by 1.6 deaths per 100,000 women.

There are also stark and concerning racial disparities in maternal mortality are concerning: Black women are three to four times more likely to die from a pregnancy- related complication than non-Hispanic white women.ⁱ In Maryland, the maternal mortality rate for Black women is 3.7 times that of White women and the racial disparity has widened in recent years.ⁱⁱ

Inclusion of dental amendment

Health Care for the Homeless also supports the amendment adopted by the Senate to include dental coverage in the definition of “health coverage.” At Health Care for the Homeless, we see daily the devastating effects of a health care system that denies dental coverage to some of our community's most vulnerable members: adults

¹ Kaiser Family Foundation, *State Health Facts, [Health Insurance Coverage of the Total Population, 2019.](#)*

² CDC, *Vital Signs: Pregnancy-Related Deaths, United States, 2011-2015 and Strategies for Prevention, 13 States, 2013-2017* (2019), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6818e1.htm>

experiencing homelessness. Many of our clients go their entire adult lives without dental care. Oral health is critical to overall physical health:

- Tooth decay can cause infections, which can lead to a range of health complications.
- Oral health affects how we eat, exacerbating digestive issues, diabetes and weight loss.
- Oral disease is associated with increased risk of stroke and cardiovascular disease.

We respectfully request a favorable report on this bill as amended to include dental coverage.

Health Care for the Homeless is Maryland's leading provider of integrated health services and supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We work to prevent and end homelessness for vulnerable individuals and families by providing quality, integrated health care and promoting access to affordable housing and sustainable incomes through direct service, advocacy, and community engagement. We deliver integrated medical care, mental health services, state-certified addiction treatment, dental care, social services, and housing support services for over 10,000 Marylanders annually at sites in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. For more information, visit www.hchmd.org.

ⁱ CDC Newsroom: *Black, American Indian/ Alaska Native Women Most Affected*, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html>

ⁱⁱ Report of the Senate President's Advisory Workgroup on Equity and Inclusion (2021), <http://www.mgaleg.maryland.gov/pubs-current/SenatePresidentAdvisoryWorkgrouponEquityandInclusion.pdf>