



Maryland Community Health System

Committee: House Health and Government Operations Committee

Bill: House Bill 265 – Dental Services – Qualification for Maryland Dent-Care Program and Study on the Use of Dental Online Credentialing

Hearing Date: January 28, 2025

Position: Support

Maryland Community Health System (MCHS) strongly supports *House Bill 265 – Dental Services Qualification for Maryland Dent-Care Program and Study on Use of Online Credentialing*. This bill expands the eligibility for the Maryland Dent-Care Program to include part-time dentists and dental hygienists. The bill also requires the Maryland Insurance Administration to assess the status of online credentialing among dental carriers.

Urgent Need for More Dental Hygienists and Dentists at FQHCs

Maryland Community Health System (MCHS) is a network of federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) that serve underserved communities in urban, suburban, and rural areas across Maryland. FQHC dental clinics are major components of the dental safety net system, providing essential oral healthcare services to underserved populations. Building and expanding dental clinics and retaining dental providers within existing FQHCs is an important strategy to bridge the gap between medical and dental services offered by FQHCs.

Maryland has long experienced a shortage of dentists and dental hygienists. Our health centers have particularly commented on the severity of the dental hygienist shortage. Some federally qualified health centers have dental hygienist vacancies that have been open for nearly a year.

The Maryland FQHC experience reflects national trends. According to the Health Policy Institute's (American Dental Association) latest quarterly report, 92% of dental practices reporting that it had been extremely or very challenging when recruiting dental hygienists.¹

FQHCs use loan repayment programs as part of their strategy to recruit and retain clinicians. To be effective, loan repayment programs should reflect the needs of the workforce. Given the need of

many clinicians to provide child care or elder care, the loan repayment programs for physicians, physician assistants, and nurse provide eligibility for part-time clinicians. The Maryland Dent-Care Program should be updated to align with Maryland's other loan repayment program.

If Maryland's Dent-Care Program is updated to provide eligibility for part-time clinicians, it will help in the recruitment and retention of both dentists and dental hygienists. The change would be particularly impactful in recruiting dental hygienists. Ninety-five percentage of dental hygienists are women, and women are more likely than men to work part-time because of family obligations.ⁱⁱ

On-line Credentialing for Dental Carriers

MCHS recently convened a group of credentialing managers at FQHCs to understand their infrastructure needs. We learned that most dental carriers do not have an online credentialing process, unlike health insurers that use the CAQH online platform for credentialing. As a result, it is particularly time-consuming and burdensome to enroll dentists in provider panels. The bill requires the Maryland Insurance Administration to survey dental carriers in an effort to better understand the barriers to online credentialing.

Conclusion

MCHS strongly supports this bill because it will help federally qualified health centers recruit and retain dental providers and meet the needs of our patients. We ask for a favorable report. If we can provide further information, please contact Robyn Elliott at relliott@policypartners.net.

ⁱ https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/sept2024_hpi_economic_outlook_dentistry_main.pdf?rev=a9c8497a7f7144d3837346cac311c488&hash=090A0346A769686474FD634B9355B5D9

ⁱⁱ <https://www.rdhmag.com/career-profession/inspiration/article/14186906/browngirl-rdh-promoting-diversity-in-the-dental-hygiene-profession>

ⁱⁱ https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/dental_school_grads_gender_2023-24.pdf?rev=f60fe5b32e0848529a087cdcac9e42c2&hash=3A569643D4289D372ABF6E8DA79119FA