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Andrew B. MacLean, JD, CEO | Dan Morin, Director of Communications & Government Affairs

TO: The Honorable Ned Claxton, Chair
The Honorable Michele Meyer, Chair
Members, Joint Standing Committee On Health and Human Services

FM: Dan Morin, Director of Communications and Government Affairs

DATE: April 26, 2021

RE: **Support**
LD 996, An Act To Improve Dental Health Access for Maine Children and Adults with Low Incomes

The Maine Medical Association is the state's largest professional physician organization representing more than 4300 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical specialties, organizations, and practice settings.

We offer our unconditional support for LD 996, An Act To Improve Dental Health Access for Maine Children and Adults with Low Incomes. We also support

Having access to dental care is just as important as having access to a primary care physician. Most realize that without proper oral hygiene, bacteria can reach levels that might lead to oral infections, such as tooth decay and gum disease but the health of a person's mouth, teeth and gums can greatly affect their overall general health, leading to other diseases seemingly unrelated to oral hygiene.

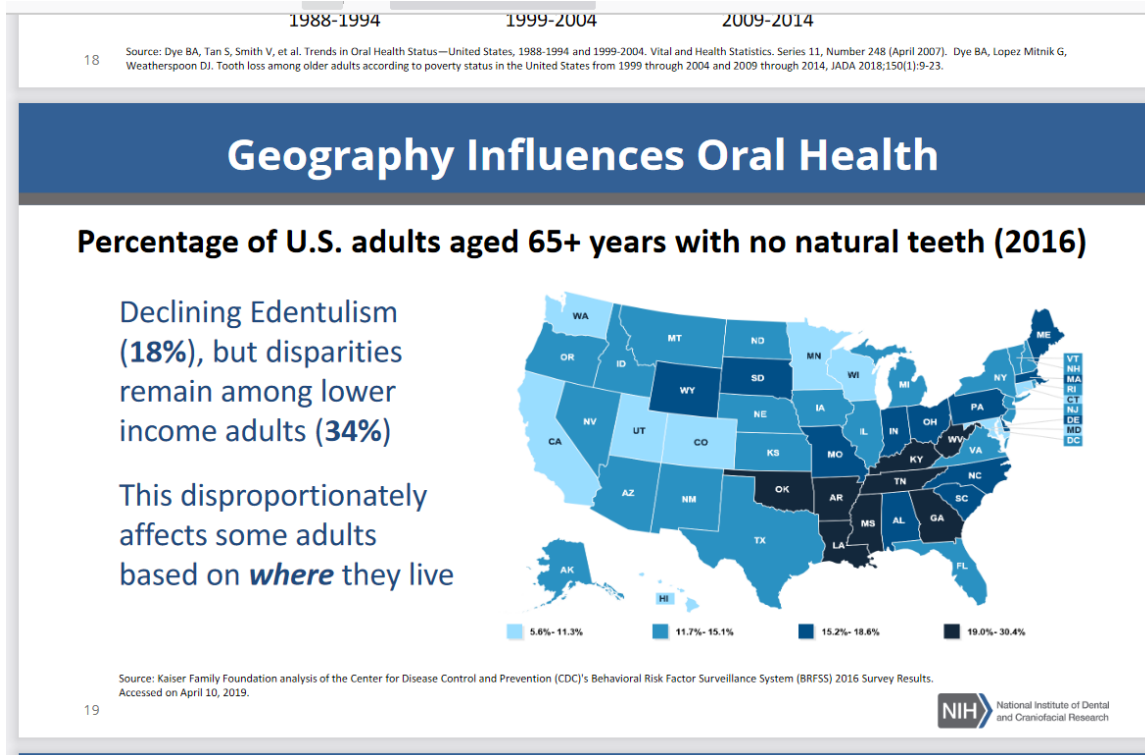
A growing body of evidence has linked oral health, particularly periodontal (gum) disease, to several chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. In pregnant women, poor oral health has also been associated with premature births and low birth weight. (see back page for more detailed information)

The solution? Regular visits to the dentist.

The [2000 Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health in America](#)'s major message was: "Oral Health is more than healthy teeth and is integral to the general health and well-being of all Americans." It also identified the inequities and disparities that affect those least able to muster the resources to achieve optimal oral health. The report identified, "barriers to oral health include lack of access to care, whether because of limited income or lack of insurance, transportation, or the flexibility to take time off from work to attend to personal or family needs for care."

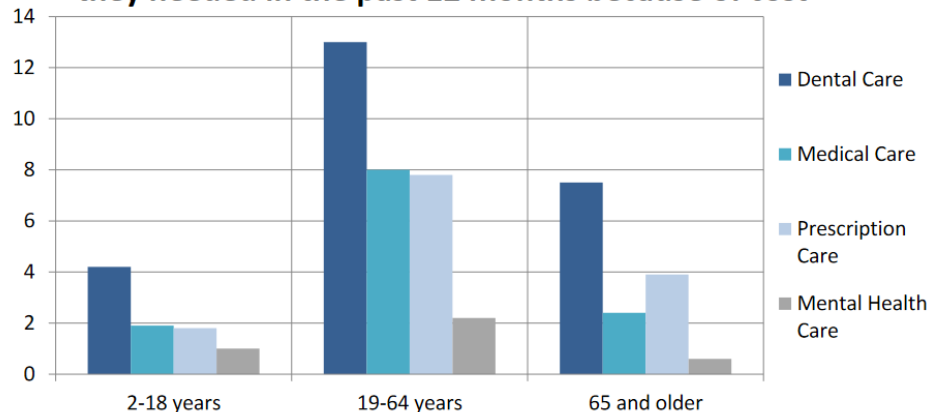
The 2020 Surgeon General's Report, [Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges](#), listed touched on oral health as one of six priorities for the U.S. Surgeon General, in addition opioids and addiction, tobacco, community health and economic prosperity, health and national security, and emerging public health threats.

The following slide from 2020 Report shows Maine as ranking near the top—the wrong end—in percentage of adults aged 65+ years with no natural teeth.



Cost: A Major Obstacle to Health Care

Percent of people who did not get selected health care services they needed in the past 12 months because of cost



30

Source: M Vujcic. Health Affairs 2016;35(12):2176-2182.

NIH National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a major crisis, affecting and straining health care systems, including some very advanced ones. The pandemic may have also indirectly affected access to health care for patients with other conditions, not related to COVID-19. The pandemic overwhelmed health care systems across the country were not able to manage non-COVID-19 related visits and/or admissions. For this reason, the MMA strongly advocates for better access to front end care for all, be it a primary care medical home and dental homes. Emergency care is not health care. It is costly and forces people to wait until illnesses are severe and potentially life threatening.

Taking care of your oral health is an investment in your overall health. We urge the committee to join other New England states such as Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island in providing extensive child and adult Medicaid dental benefits under MaineCare for your constituents by voting Ought to Pass on LD 996 and the relevant components of LD 62 and LD 72

[According to the Mayo Clinic](#), the following conditions can also be linked to poor oral health:

- **Endocarditis.** This infection of the inner lining of your heart chambers or valves (endocardium) typically occurs when bacteria or other germs from another part of your body, such as your mouth, spread through your bloodstream and attach to certain areas in your heart.
- **Cardiovascular disease.** Although the connection is not fully understood, some research suggests that heart disease, clogged arteries and stroke might be linked to the inflammation and infections that oral bacteria can cause.
- **Pregnancy and birth complications.** Periodontitis has been linked to premature birth and low birth weight.
- **Pneumonia.** Certain bacteria in your mouth can be pulled into your lungs, causing pneumonia and other respiratory diseases.