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**SUBSTITUTE HOUSE JOINT MEMORIAL 4014**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2020 Regular Session**

**By** House Health Care & Wellness (originally sponsored by Representatives Riccelli, Chapman, Tarleton, Orwall, Fey, Macri, Wylie, Doglio, Stonier, Kloba, and Pollet)

TO THE HONORABLE DONALD J. TRUMP, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, AND TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE AND THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, AND TO THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES, IN CONGRESS ASSEMBLED:

We, your Memorialists, the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Washington, in legislative session assembled, respectfully represent and petition as follows:

WHEREAS, Medicare provides health benefits for nearly sixty million people nationally, including more than one million Washington residents, making it an essential provider of health care for older adults and disabled individuals; and

WHEREAS, The federal Medicare statute currently excludes coverage for almost all oral health care, leaving seniors at great risk for tooth decay and disease; and

WHEREAS, According to a 2017 Senior Oral Health Survey by Arcora Foundation, only sixty-one percent of Washington seniors report having dental insurance. Only forty-five percent of low-income seniors report having dental insurance; and

WHEREAS, Among Washington seniors not accessing dental care, cost was cited as the main barrier; and

WHEREAS, According to the behavioral risk factor surveillance system, 2016, twenty-eight percent of Washington seniors ages 65 and over have severe tooth loss (six or more teeth) due to decay, and one in ten seniors have total tooth loss. Among low-income seniors (less than 15,000 dollars per year), more than one in four have total tooth loss; and

WHEREAS, Dental care access for seniors is an equity issue: Seniors of color are more likely to have tooth decay and tooth loss compared to white seniors; and

WHEREAS, Oral health is essential to nutrition and overall health and wellness, especially for older adults:

(1) Dental pain and tooth loss can prevent seniors from maintaining a nutritious diet; nearly two out of five low-income seniors report they "very often" struggle with biting and chewing due to poor oral health;

(2) Oral disease is linked to heart disease, stroke, and Alzheimer's. Untreated gum disease can exacerbate diabetes complications; and

(3) Untreated oral disease leads to more costly medical conditions; and

WHEREAS, A comprehensive Medicare dental benefit, with access to all community dental providers licensed in the state, will improve Washington seniors' health status and overall well-being, and reduce medical expenses;

NOW THEREFORE, Your Memorialists respectfully pray that Congress include coverage for dental care in the federal Medicare program.

BE IT RESOLVED, That copies of this Memorial be immediately transmitted to the Honorable Donald J. Trump, President of the United States, the President of the United States Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and each member of Congress from the State of Washington.