

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HJM 4014

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Health Care & Wellness

**Brief Description:** Asking Congress to include dental care in Medicare.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Riccelli, Chapman, Tarleton, Orwall, Fey, Macri, Wylie, Doglio, Stonier, Kloba and Pollet.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Health Care & Wellness: 1/17/20, 1/28/20 [DPS].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Requests the federal government to include coverage for dental care in the Medicare program.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Cody, Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Schmick, Ranking Minority Member; Chopp, Davis, Harris, Maycumber, Riccelli, Robinson, Stonier, Thai and Tharinger.

**Staff:** Nico Wedekind (786-7290) and Jim Morishima (786-7191).

**Background:**

Medicare is a federally provided health insurance program for individuals 65 or older, as well as certain individuals under 65 with disabilities. To be eligible for Medicare, an individual under 65 with a disability must first have received disability benefits for at least 24 months. Individuals with end-stage renal disease are also eligible for Medicare, regardless of age.

Medicare coverage is divided into 4 major parts: A, B, C, and D. Part A covers inpatient hospital stays, care in skilled nursing facilities, hospice care, and some home health care. Part B covers certain doctor's services, outpatient care, durable medical supplies, preventative services, mental health services, and limited outpatient prescription drugs. Part C creates the

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Medicare+ Choice alternatives to "Original Medicare," which allows private insurance providers to bundle Parts A, B, and, optionally, D into one insurance plan. Medicare+ Choice plans may also include benefits not offered by Original Medicare, such as vision, hearing, dental, and well-being programs. Part D covers prescription drugs, though which drugs are provided depends on which insurance plan is selected.

Medicare does not cover long-term care, most dental care (unless the dental services require hospitalization), eye exams for the purpose of prescriptive glasses, dentures, cosmetic surgery, acupuncture, hearing aids and exams for fitting such aids, or routine foot care.

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**Summary of Substitute Bill:**

The Legislature requests the United States Congress (Congress) to include coverage for dental care in the federal Medicare program.

**Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The substitute bill includes a finding that providing 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.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Many older adults do not have access to oral healthcare benefits. All health starts with oral health. The Legislature needs to ensure that people are not having to make choices between spending on food and housing or dental health services. Many other states are asking Congress to act on this, and while there is work to be done, Washington should join them in sending a message in support of routine and comprehensive dental care for Medicare beneficiaries.

Good oral care leads to better general health, and better general health leads to greater independence for aging individuals. More independent aging individuals means less cost to the state and families.

Medicare serves many of the most vulnerable community members in Washington and its services could be drastically improved by adding oral care to the services covered.

Fewer than half of low-income seniors in Washington report having dental insurance. Poor oral health is linked to a number of systemic health conditions. It is harder to maintain a healthy diet with missing or painful teeth.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Adding dental benefits to Medicare would be a great thing, but there needs to be a stronger message sent to Congress and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that the services provided by all licensed community dental providers are included under Medicare dental benefits.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Riccelli, prime sponsor; Walt Bowen, Washington Senior Lobby; Alex Hur, Statewide Poverty Action Network; and Alison Mondt, Arcora Foundation.

(Other) Carolyn Logue, Washington Denturist Association.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.