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Statement from the Kentucky Oral Health Coalition on Senate Bill 65

The Kentucky Oral Health Coalition is dedicated to ensuring meaningful access to oral health care for all Kentuckians. While we recognize the process allowing for this expansion may warrant a worthy debate, we believe the decision to expand adult Medicaid dental benefits will improve oral health outcomes for our most vulnerable Kentuckians – including those with substance use disorders and pregnant women.

We know that expanding the available benefits alone is not enough to increase access – and there are significant workforce challenges impacting care in our state. This expansion brought with it an increase in adult dental reimbursement rates for providers after more than 20 years of stagnant rates. The increase in reimbursement rates alongside the expansion of benefits was a necessary step to ensure providers' ability to provide new services to patients – and we are hopeful this will help increase the number of Medicaid-enrolled providers over time.

The need for comprehensive dental benefits is well-established in the Commonwealth, which ranks in the bottom five on several oral health indicators and has more adults age 65+ with no natural teeth than any other state. This expansion brought new coverage options to more than 900,000 low-income and disabled adults. Removing the expanded benefits would negatively impact the oral health of thousands who are already accessing this critical coverage – some progressing through treatment plans who would be left with partial repairs and restorations. Ensuring adults have access to routine dental visits as well as restorative treatment improves oral health outcomes and reduces costs. In fact, states that offer comprehensive adult Medicaid dental benefits see a dramatic reduction in spending on ER visits for non-traumatic dental care each year.

By no means is this expansion the answer to the growing oral health crisis in Kentucky, but it does offer a first step toward providing comprehensive dental care for Kentuckians.

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Kentucky Oral Health Coalition is a group of concerned citizens, advocates, and professionals working together to improve oral health across Kentucky. Learn more at kyoralhealthcoalition.org.