

**Monday, November 16, 2009**

## "Optional" Medicaid Benefits Coalition Adds Its Support to Legislative Letter

*Last week, the Michigan League for Human Services drafted a letter to call for the reinstatement of "optional" Medicaid benefits. The Michigan Oral Health Coalition Board approved the letter and signed its name to the list of supporters. The letter, which has been sent to legislators and the media, is below.*

To: Members of the Michigan Legislature, Gov. Jennifer Granholm  
From: Concerned Organizations  
Re: Elimination of Optional Medicaid benefits

The elimination of Medicaid adult dental services, as well as the other federally defined "optional" services, is causing suffering and threatening the lives of the most vulnerable people in Michigan. Lower-cost prevention care is being sacrificed for questionable short-term savings. Restoring these services could help keep Medicaid adult recipients healthy and save money in the long run.

The July 1 elimination of dental benefits has already had severe consequences. Officials with a dental clinic treating an elderly developmentally disabled woman in Northern Michigan said her condition was complicated by a severe dental infection that they were not able to effectively treat because of the cancellation of dental benefits. She died Oct. 7 in an Alpena hospital.

The family of another disabled Michigan man says he developed a serious oral infection. His teeth were so bad that they posed a risk of choking so they were pulled. Now the man has no ability to get dentures because of the lack of dental benefits. His food intake is limited without teeth and is threatening his health.

In addition, the state of Michigan must defend a lawsuit filed on behalf of 400,000 Medicaid beneficiaries for the cancellation of dental benefits. The lawsuit contends that thousands of Michigan residents with marginal resources will be more vulnerable to debilitating and potentially life-threatening illnesses.

Lower-cost dental services, as well as vision, chiropractic, and podiatric care are necessary to avoid complications that are expensive to treat in Michigan's emergency rooms or intensive care units.

In addition, for the savings of \$5 million state dollars, Michigan will lose \$16 million in federal dollars to pay dental providers to provide services in the appropriate setting.

How many deaths or hours of suffering will it take to restore these services to provide lower-cost care to protect our most vulnerable citizens from painful, avoidable conditions? These are just a couple of examples of the impact of these harsh budget cuts. Policymakers must understand that

budgets are not just numbers to be balanced on paper, they are about real peoples' lives and deaths.

Signed,

AARP Michigan  
AFT-Michigan  
The Arc Michigan  
Center for Civil Justice  
Common Cause of Michigan  
Comprehensive School Health Coordinators' Association  
The Disability Network of Flint  
Global Behavior: Education  
Dianne Hass, parent of adult child with disabilities  
Kalamazoo County Older Adult Services Advisory Council  
Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Boards  
Michigan Association of United Ways  
Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency  
Michigan County Social Services Association  
Michigan Dental Association  
Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council  
Michigan Disability Rights Coalition  
Michigan Campaign for Quality Care  
Michigan's Children  
Michigan Head Start Association  
Michigan League for Human Services  
Michigan Long Term Care Ombudsman Program  
Michigan Nurses Association  
Michigan Olmstead Coalition  
Michigan Oral Health Coalition  
Michigan Poverty Law Program  
Michigan Primary Care Association  
Michigan Protection and Advocacy Service  
Michigan Public Health Association  
Michigan State AFL-CIO  
Michigan Statewide Independent Living Council  
Michigan Unitarian Universalists Social Justice Network  
PHI Michigan  
Tri-County Dental Health Council  
UAW Michigan CAP  
United Cerebral Palsy of Michigan