



March 14, 2017

TESTIMONY: Written only

To: Rep. Dee Morikawa, Chair  
Senate Committee on Human Services  
Rep. Della Au Belatti, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health

From: Hawaii Public Health Association

Subject: **SUPPORT – SB27 SD1 Relating to Oral Health**

The Hawaii Public Health Association is an association of over 600 community members, public health professionals, and organizations statewide dedicated to improving public health. HPHA also serves as a voice for public professionals and as a repository for information about public health in the Pacific.

HPHA **supports** the passage of SB27 SD1 which would make an appropriate to restore basic adult dental benefits to Medicaid enrollees.

Hawaii has one of the worst rates of oral health for children and adults alike in the U.S. The August 2015 DOH report, “Hawaii Oral Health: Key Findings”, reported that there are significant oral health disparities in Hawaii’s low-income residents, versus higher income residents, who are less likely to seek dental care, report more loss of teeth, over-use emergency room visits for oral health emergencies, and have lower overall dental health status. Good oral health is essential for optimal overall health, and poor dental health has been linked to higher rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and sepsis as well as premature infants of pregnant women.

There are also significant oral health disparities in Hawaii related to education, health insurance, and geographic location status. Children whose parents are on Medicaid are covered for preventive and treatment services, but their parents may not seek or access dental services, if the adult family members are not covered. Adults on Medicaid who are shown to be at greater risk and are more in need of oral health services are currently receiving emergency-only dental services, which are more invasive, painful and risky, more costly, and are a lower standard of care for oral health than our general population is receiving.

The DOH report specifically recommends as a key strategy based on these findings that, Medicaid services be expanded for ALL adults in Hawaii beyond the current coverage for emergencies only, to include preventative and treatment services. We ask that you provide the policy support and resources to ensure appropriate standards of dental care for our adult Medicaid population.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Holly Kessler  
Executive Director