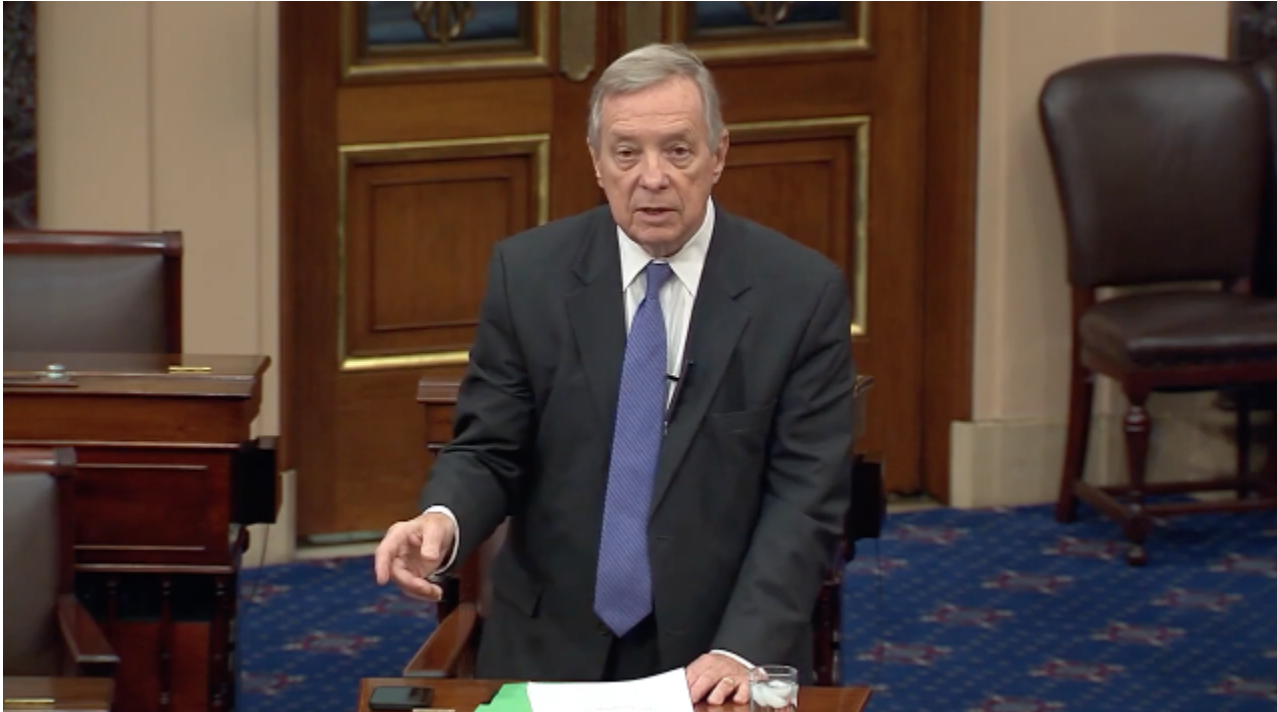


Durbin, Marshall Introduce New Legislation To Bolster Public Health Efforts To Improve Dental Health

January 17 2024 1:18 PM



WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Senator Roger Marshall, M.D. (R-KS) today introduced new bipartisan legislation, the *Promoting Dental Health Act*, to reauthorize funding the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Oral Health program for the next five years. The Oral Health program receives \$20.5 million in annual funding for a range of public health activities to promote oral health. This funding is allocated to 20 states to prevent cavities, gum disease, and other painful and serious conditions, including by supporting dental education, data collection, school-based sealant care for low-income children, state fluoridation efforts, workforce development, and research into gaps in patient care.

Currently, Illinois does not receive any of the \$20.5 million in direct grants, due to the fact that the Oral Health program is not adequately funded to serve every state. However, 2.8 million Illinoisans live in communities with a shortage of dental

providers, and only 37 percent of children covered by Medicaid have a dental visit in a given year. One study found that it is nearly six times easier for a child with private insurance to get an oral health care appointment than those who have Medicaid.

“Dental care is a fundamental part of staying healthy. It’s imperative that oral health care is easily accessible and adequately funded so that Illinoisans, regardless of their economic status, can see a dental professional and prevent serious complications,” said Durbin. “The *Promoting Dental Health Act*, a bipartisan effort with Senator Marshall, will ensure that the CDC Oral Health program has the resources necessary to serve more Americans, including through efforts in Illinois.”

“As a physician, I cannot stress enough the importance of prioritizing your oral health and dental care,” Marshall said. “Reauthorizing critical funding for this Oral Health program will help our Kansas communities promote good oral health habits and prevent disease. I’m proud to partner with Senator Durbin in introducing bipartisan legislation to keep this successful program going and help Kansans and Illinoisans alike.”

“The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry applauds the Senators’ bipartisan effort to reauthorize the CDC oral health program, continuing support for states and local communities to monitor and prevent dental disease and build healthy water infrastructure, among other initiatives positively impacting the oral health of children and families,” said Scott W. Cashion, D.D.S., M.S., President, American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD).

Today’s new legislation is one part of Durbin’s comprehensive initiative to bolster the dental workforce and expand oral health access. In November, Durbin sent [three oversight letters](#) to DentaQuest, Envolve, and Avesis – three companies that administer dental benefits for Medicaid managed care companies (MCOs) in Illinois – to seek answers on barriers to providing dental care to Medicaid enrollees. The letters raised concerns and investigate certain insurance practices that can limit and discourage provider participation in Medicaid, which exacerbate existing reimbursement rate challenges, resulting in an estimate of only 24 percent of Illinois dentists accepting Medicaid. As a result, Medicaid enrollees, including children and people with disabilities, have difficulty accessing adequate dental care—often facing extensive wait lists for necessary treatment.

Durbin also sent a [letter](#) to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Administrator Chiquita Brooks-LaSure urging her to notify states of recent Medicare changes in coverage and billing practices for oral health care services that were outlined in the 2024 Medicare Hospital Outpatient Prospective Payment System (OPPS) and Ambulatory Surgical Center (ASC) Payment System final rule. As states often model their Medicaid coverage and billing practices after Medicare’s, Durbin called on

Administrator Brooks-LaSure to inform states of these changes, which could improve treatment and care for Medicaid enrollees as well.

In May 2023, Durbin released his “[Roadmap to Grow Illinois’ Rural Health Workforce](#),” which includes partnering with Illinois dentists to organize efforts to provide new funding to address health care workforce shortages and staffing crises in rural Illinois.

Durbin also authored a provision in the *American Rescue Plan* to invest \$1 billion into the National Health Service Corps (NHSC), which funds scholarships and loan repayment for new doctors, nurses, dentists, and behavioral health clinicians who commit to serve in rural and urban areas of need. Medical professionals can graduate with student debt of more than \$200,000, which can discourage them from pursuing these careers in the first place, or lead to them choosing to practice in high-paying specialties or in more affluent and urban areas. The NHSC program helps build the pipeline of new health providers and surge them to shortage areas. Today, Illinois has nearly 1,000 health professionals serving under the NHSC program. In conjunction with this funding, Durbin introduced the bipartisan [Restoring America’s Health Care Workforce and Readiness Act](#), which will reauthorize and increase funding for NHSC.

The *Promoting Dental Health Act* has earned endorsements from the American Dental Association (ADA), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), and National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD).