

Date: November 16, 2009
To: Members of the Michigan Legislature
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
Adult Well-Being Services
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 Campaign for Quality Care
Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency
Michigan County Social Services Association
Michigan Dental Association
Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council
Michigan Disability Rights Coalition
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
Michigan's Children
PHI Michigan
Paul Shaheen, board member, Children's Trust Fund
Tri-County Dental Health Council
UAW Michigan CAP
United Cerebral Palsy of Michigan