



# PUTTING MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS

## Investing in Arizona's Oral Health for a Brighter Future

*Arizonans need a fiscally responsible investment in comprehensive dental care as part of AHCCCS coverage. Comprehensive dental care prevents pain, promotes overall health, and can save millions of dollars by preventing costly dental and medical problems.*

### Daniel's Story

Although Daniel has AHCCCS, he had not been to the dentist in a few years because his plan only covers dental emergencies. He did have a cavity that was bothering him, but he didn't think it qualified as an emergency. Instead, he took care to avoid foods that were hard to chew, and used over-the-counter pain medications when it really stung. Besides, he could barely find the time to take his kids to the dentist, even though they did have dental coverage.

So, when Daniel's tooth broke and the resulting infection began to cause him even more pain, he had no choice but to go the emergency room. There, he was given antibiotics, a strong recommendation to see a dentist, and a pat on his back out the door. Great advice, but it was hard to find somewhere to go.

His extraction was covered, but the gap in his smile does nothing for his confidence. Daniel often catches himself in the mirror, his eyes drooping lower than the corners of his mouth. He wishes he could have found a solution sooner—if there even was one to find.

### But what if Daniel was covered by comprehensive dental insurance?

Now his whole family is covered, Daniel feels comfortable scheduling appointments to visit the dentist together. He's glad he has an appointment on the books; his cavity just started bothering him.

The dentist recommends a filling and a deep cleaning for Daniel, while his children get sealants to prevent painful cavities like their dad's. The next time they all come in, Daniel's tooth is as good as new, preventing an expensive dental emergency down the line. The hygienist even helpfully informs him that keeping his gums healthy can improve his diabetes.

Daniel's family celebrates the successful trip to the dentist by going out to eat—though he thinks he'll enjoy a salad today.

### Fact Check

AHCCCS provides "emergency only" dental coverage to adults, meaning that someone must wait until their dental problem is severe before they can access care.

Many emergency rooms are not equipped to effectively handle dental infections.

Adults without coverage often lack a "dental home," meaning they don't have an established relationship with a dental provider.

Children who reside in states that provide Medicaid adult dental coverage to their parents are more likely to have had a dental visit in the past year and less likely to defer dental care.

Research shows that controlling gum disease improves patients' diabetes. Patients who get treatment for their gum disease show improved glycemic control.

Missing or diseased teeth affects the ability to chew and can lead to nutritional deficiencies. This in turn can worsen pre-existing health conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

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## The Financial Case for Comprehensive Dental Medicaid Coverage

**Comprehensive Dental Coverage: A mix of services of diagnostic, preventative, and restorative procedures with a per-person, per fiscal year cap of \$1,000.**

Comprehensive coverage would cover full dental exams, x-rays, preventative teeth cleanings, "deep" cleanings for patients with gum disease, and restorative services, like fillings, to treat decay.

**Arizonans need a fiscally responsible investment in comprehensive dental coverage.**

Arizona should invest in oral health care for adult Medicaid members because comprehensive dental care can:

- eliminate excruciating and unnecessary mouth pain
- prevent expensive dental emergencies
- improve people's ability to eat nutritious foods
- helps to control costly chronic diseases
- empower adults to get and keep jobs
- improve overall health and mental health!

## By the Numbers

**\$2 per person**

**per month cost to Arizona for comprehensive dental coverage.**

States with comprehensive coverage on average have lower per person dental expenditures.

**\$21 million**

**costs savings in medical care per year.**

Due to the connection between oral and overall health, dental care improves medical outcomes for patients with health conditions.

**\$2,840** saving per diabetes patient  
**\$1,090** saving per heart disease patient  
**\$2,400** saving per pregnant patient

**\$16 million**

**cost savings due to increased participation in the workforce over the next decade.**

Employers are less likely to hire people with missing teeth, and employees with dental problems will miss work days or be less productive.

**79%**

**of ER dental visits could be diverted to a dental office.**

People who visit ERs for dental problems receive pain medication and antibiotics, but not effective dental care. This is costly and ineffective.

### Sources

"Making the Case for Dental Coverage for Adults in All State Medicaid Programs" - American Dental Association, July 2021

"Fiscal & Economic Impacts of Adult Preventative Dental Medicaid Benefit" - Grand Canyon Institute, October 2023