

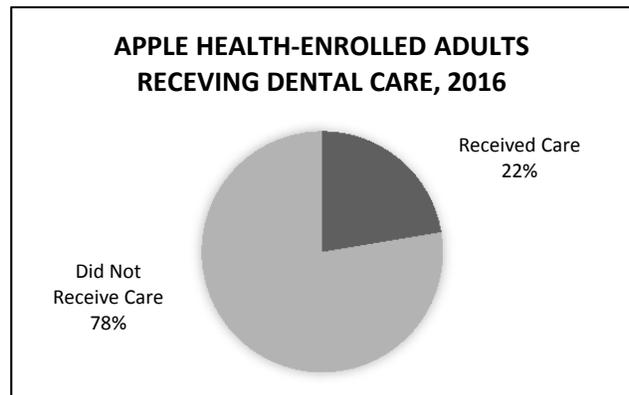


Position Paper: Pass the Capital Budget to Increase Oral Health Access at Community Health Centers

The Legislature should pass the 2017-19 capital budget, which includes a \$12.6 million investment in community health center dental clinics. This will increase access to oral health care for low-income and uninsured Washingtonians.

During the 2017 legislative session, lawmakers recognized that Washington’s health care safety net faces a crisis in oral health capacity. While health care reform and the restoration of the Apple Health (Medicaid) adult dental benefit has extended dental coverage to low-income individuals and families, legislators on both sides of the aisle recognized that major capital investments in dental facilities were necessary to make quality dental care accessible.

In 2016, only 22 percent of Apple Health-enrolled adults used their dental coverage. No data exists for 500,000 uninsured Washingtonians, nor for individuals and families who have medical coverage but no dental coverage. Many low-income patients have not seen a dentist in years, and often haven’t had regular dental care in their lifetimes. This leads to a long-term accumulation of oral disease – multiple cavities, broken teeth or abscesses, gum disease, and oral infections.



Community Health Centers Have Stepped Up to Help – But Need Capital Investments to Do More

Washington’s community health centers (CHCs) have worked tirelessly to expand access to dental care. Between 2014 and 2015, the number of Apple Health-enrolled adults who received dental services at CHCs increased by 55 percent. CHCs have used existing resources to expand services not only within their own walls, but in mobile outreach units, homeless shelters, supportive housing units, and community centers. Nevertheless, our state must provide at least 630,000 more visits per year to ensure that low-income individuals and families get the care they need. To begin to close this gap, Washington CHCs are seeking capital investments to build and expand dental clinics.

The capital budget that passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 92-1 contains a historic and unprecedented investment in CHC dental capacity. These 20 projects, strategically located in high-need communities all over the state, will bring oral health care to 60,000 new patients.

It’s time for the legislature to pass the capital budget and help low-income and uninsured Washingtonians get the care they need to live healthy, productive lives. We can’t afford to wait any longer!



Oral Health Care Changes Lives

Low-income and uninsured individuals often delay oral health care until extreme pain makes waiting unbearable, and ultimately seek more costly emergency room treatment. Poor oral health also complicates the diabetes management and is linked to some types of cardiovascular disease. CHC dental clinics not only help prevent and treat serious dental and medical complications, but also connect patients with primary care, behavioral health, case management, and all of the other integrated services that CHCs offer.

The number of patients who can be served by these new CHC dental facilities is likely to *increase* over time, making this package an ideal capital investment. Due to lack of access, many low-income patients have accumulated numerous oral health problems. Many of these new patients will have complex restorative care needs that will require multiple appointments per year. As these patients transition to less-frequent preventive care, more and more patients will be served.

Break Ground on New Dental Capacity by Passing the Capital Budget

The sooner the Legislature passes the capital budget, the sooner CHCs will be serving new patients. Each project, tailored to the distinctive needs of the community it serves, will make an enormous difference in the lives of thousands of low-income and uninsured Washingtonians.