



## Support SB 139: Extend Telehealth Protections to Dental Patients

Last year’s SB20-212 offered Colorado patients key protections for access to affordable telehealth services – of particular urgency and importance during a global pandemic. Notably, many dental plans in Colorado are separately regulated from medical (or “health benefit”) plans, which leaves a technical glitch in the applicability of the insurance provisions adopted in SB20-212.

Though dentists are included providers in the existing law, SB20-212 only addressed telehealth services provided by medical plans, not dental plans. This leaves potential gaps and variance in coverage for Colorado patients in terms of access to dental telehealth services during COVID-19 and beyond. While some dental plans have proactively embraced the innovative benefits of telehealth, it is essential to ensure consistent access to telehealth services across all dental plans in Colorado.

SB21-139 would correct the current gap in state law and ensure consistent telehealth access for all patients regardless of their type of dental coverage. The dental stakeholder community partners above collectively ask your support for this bill.

### Examples of Dental Telehealth Services

Delivering dental services via telehealth may seem counterintuitive, but a number of dental conditions can be appropriately screened and diagnosed via telehealth technologies. Sometimes telehealth is used to significantly extend the time before a patient needs an in-person dental visit – using topical medications, antibiotics or visits with a community dental hygienist. Other times, a prompt follow up surgical visit is still required, but telehealth helped to reduce potential patient and staff exposure as well as conserved PPE for at least the pre-op visit. Some examples of dental telehealth applications include:

- A patient with developmental disabilities and concurrent health conditions that chipped a tooth and needs a dentist to give guidance on whether it needs to be treated now.
- A cancer patient that has mouth sores from chemotherapy and needs a dentist’s help in prescribing some topical medication to aid in healing.
- A senior adult whose dentures have caused irritation where telehealth might avoid an immediate in-person visit through some temporary home solutions.
- A child with a developing cavity who can participate in a drive-through clinic hosted by a dental hygienist and have the tooth treated through application of a cavity-stopping liquid called SDF.

### Key Benefits of Dental Telehealth Services

- Preserves patient choice, flexibility and access options for already covered dental benefits that are appropriate for delivery via telehealth throughout the duration of the COVID pandemic and beyond.
- Reduces virus transmission risks for high-risk patients and providers during COVID by decreasing the number of in-person dental visits required.
- Reduces the need for transportation and travel for some dental care services – of particular benefit for patients in rural and other historically underserved communities, as well as senior adults.

Dental is a key aspect of primary care, and going without this essential care can lead to infections that may result in high costs, poor medical outcomes, and even be fatal. Adding dental plans to existing consumer telehealth laws will extend care options during the COVID pandemic and beyond. **SB 139 passed the Senate unanimously.** It is the right thing to do to protect patients in our state.

**Please support SB 139 - and join us in protecting the health of Colorado’s vulnerable patients by including dental plans in our state’s telehealth protections**

## **SB 139 Sponsors: Fields, Simpson; Lontine, Soper**

### **SB 139 Supporters**

- AARP Colorado
- American Academy of Pediatrics, Colorado Chapter
- Association of Dental Support Organizations
- Children's Hospital Colorado
- Colorado Academy of Family Physicians
- Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care
- Colorado Children's Campaign
- Colorado Community Health Network
- Colorado Consumer Health Initiative
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
- Colorado Dental Association
- Colorado Dental Hygienists' Association
- Colorado Rural Health Center
- Comfort Dental
- Delta Dental of Colorado
- Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation
- Denver Health
- Healthier Colorado

#### **For more information, please contact:**

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