

# Annual: Smiles For Children Improving Dental Care Across Virginia- FY 2021

A Report to the Virginia General Assembly

December 15, 2021

## **Report Mandate:**

*Item 313 (K) in the 2021 Appropriation Act states the Department of Medical Assistance Services and the Virginia Department of Health shall work with representatives of the dental community: to expand the availability and delivery of dental services to pediatric Medicaid recipients; to streamline the administrative processes; and to remove impediments to the efficient delivery of dental services and reimbursement thereof. The Department of Medical Assistance Services shall report its efforts to expand dental services to the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees and the Department of Planning and Budget by December 15 each year.*

## **Background**

Established in 2005, **Smiles For Children (SFC)** is the Virginia dental program designed to improve access to high quality dental services for children enrolled in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). The program celebrated its 16th anniversary in 2021, and offers benefits to over 1.5 million Virginians. Evidence demonstrates that Virginia's **Smiles For Children** program continually achieves its goals, while serving as a model dental program among Medicaid programs.

## **Dental Advisory Committee (DAC)**

As a component of the 2005 legislation that formed the SFC program, the DAC is a professional advisory committee, which meets four times a year to provide essential input and guidance to the **SFC** program. During SFY2021, the DAC continued to play a vital role in all aspects of the SFC program, including the planning and development of the adult dental benefit. Furthermore, the DAC was a crucial component of DMAS's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Smiles For Children SFY 2021 Highlights and Program Initiatives**

### **Teledentistry**

DMAS continues to recognize the importance of the utilization of teledentistry in helping providers and **Smiles For Children** members during the pandemic.

### **Request For Proposals (RFP)**

The Department is planning to release the RFP for the dental program during the next SFY.

## About DMAS and Medicaid

***DMAS's mission is to improve the health and well-being of Virginians through access to high-quality health care coverage.***

DMAS administers Virginia's Medicaid and CHIP programs for more than 1.8 million Virginians. Members have access to primary and specialty health services, inpatient care, dental, behavioral health as well as addiction and recovery treatment services. In addition, Medicaid long-term services and supports enable thousands of Virginians to remain in their homes or to access residential and nursing home care.

Medicaid members historically have included children, pregnant women, parents and caretakers, older adults, and individuals with disabilities. In 2019, Virginia expanded the Medicaid eligibility rules to make health care coverage available to more than 500,000 newly eligible, low-income adults.

Medicaid and CHIP (known in Virginia as Family Access to Medical Insurance Security, or FAMIS) are jointly funded by Virginia and the federal government under Title XIX and Title XXI of the Social Security Act. Virginia generally receives a dollar-for-dollar federal spending match in the Medicaid program. Medicaid expansion qualifies the Commonwealth for a federal funding match of no less than 90 percent for newly eligible adults, generating cost savings that benefit the overall state budget.

## Adult Benefit Design and Implementation

Since July 1, 2021, adult Medicaid members have had access to a comprehensive expanded dental benefit. The Department of Medical Assistance places a precedence on advocating for our members. We are excited that we can now provide high quality and comprehensive oral health care for all of our members. Throughout the design and implementation of the Comprehensive Adult Benefit, our DMAS Dental Consultant engaged directly with DentaQuest, in and out of network dentists, dentists in corporate and private practice settings, dentists who practice in a FQHC environment as well as orthodontists, periodontists and endodontists. In addition, our Dental Consultant has hosted meetings with community leaders and will host meetings with state government officials. Dentists who robustly serve Intellectually Disabled (ID), as well as the elderly population, have provided insightful information regarding the needs of our members. Collaborative efforts were conducted between DMAS and DentaQuest focusing on member needs and how to best prepare and support our providers. DMAS ensured broad geographic representation to provide a diverse and inclusive perspective, while building consensus on the design and development of the program.

DMAS, the Dental Advisory Committee, the Virginia Health Catalyst, the Virginia Dental Association, Old Dominion Dental Society and DentaQuest worked in collaboration to advise and promote the new comprehensive adult dental benefit. DMAS and its stakeholders provided data and insight to support the Medicaid adult dental benefit that included significant research of other states and programs.

Prior to implementation, DMAS and its contractor, DentaQuest, reviewed financial modeling and utilization projections to assist in determining the budget and benefit design for the implementation of the comprehensive adult dental benefit.

DMAS, DentaQuest, the Virginia Dental Association and the Virginia Health Catalyst extensively engaged providers, members, and community partners and stakeholders through webinars, trainings, mailings and one-on-one conversations to increase the awareness of the benefit. Governor Ralph Northam asked dentists in the Commonwealth to participate in the programs to support better oral healthcare for all.

During this preparation time, DMAS conducted a readiness review through an independent review organization to assure the success of the program once implemented.

There has been much work done regarding the design and implementation of the enhanced adult benefit. COVID-19 exacerbated the access to quality care not

only in the Commonwealth, but throughout the entire nation as well. In order to best assist our members, there needs to be a collective push aimed at prospective dentists in the Commonwealth that focuses on encouragement and empowerment to ensure an increase in provider participation. Echoing Governor Northam's sentiments, DMAS and our partners will continue to ask dentists to consider enrolling as Medicaid dental providers. We expect and welcome an uptake in our adult members utilizing preventative dental services. DMAS will seek to increase the number of contracted providers who will advocate and serve our members. We are confident that with the expansion of our adult dental benefits, Virginians will continue to not only improve their oral health, but their overall health as well.

DMAS and DentaQuest continued outreach efforts during COVID-19 pandemic.

Efforts consisted of the following:

- DMAS and DentaQuest staff attended virtual meetings hosted by community partners, community organizations, resource groups, and MCOs.
- DentaQuest provided digital distribution of Oral Health Matters (a series of oral health educational materials), and created an email listserv to communicate with community partners.
- A virtual monthly member benefits forum for pregnant members was implemented.
- DMAS and DentaQuest collaborated with Virginia Health Catalyst and Families Forward to distribute over 3,000 children and adult oral health kits.
- Collaborated with MCOs to participate in their virtual baby showers and member advisory committee meetings.
- DentaQuest corresponded with conference coordinators for alternative opportunities to exhibit in-person at their annual conferences (i.e., newsletter inclusion, and virtual exhibits).
- DentaQuest created an early education oral health booklet that was distributed through VAHSA.

## **Strategic Goals & Achievements for SFY21**

### ***Goal #1: Ensure Robust Provider Participation***

As of June 30, 2021, there were approximately 1,889 dental providers participating in the **SFC** network at 4,551 locations. Of Virginia's practicing dentistry workforce, 31% participate in the **SFC** program. More than 93% of **SFC** network providers are accepting new patients.

### ***Goal #2 Increase/Maintain Pediatric Utilization***

In SFY 2021, the pediatric dental utilization rate for children 0-20 years of age was 48.03% compared to 50.42% in SFY 2020. Due to the on-going COVID-19

challenges, there were slight decreases in utilization. However, members are slowly returning to dental offices for treatment. Children 6-9 years of age utilized services at the highest rate (59%) of all age groupings in SFY 2021. In SFY 2021, the pediatric dental utilization rate for children aged 19-20 increased and an additional 3,423 members utilized services.

**Goal #3: Innovative Strategies to Improve Utilization through Member, Provider, and Stakeholder Outreach**

- Monthly virtual member information sessions were held by DentaQuest.
- DentaQuest partnered with managed care organizations and provided oral health kits for distribution to approximately 1,900 pregnant women.

**In SFY 2021, DentaQuest staff:**

- Conducted 83 provider trainings including individual provider education webinars and credentialing trainings.
- Distributed 49 email and fax blast communications
- Participated in 14 provider community virtual events to promote the **Smiles For Children** program and to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples include, but are not limited to:
  - Virtual events – Virginia Oral Health Summit, Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics annual conference, mini-DAC meetings, Tooth Talk sessions and Virginia Health Catalyst meetings with various clinics and providers.
- Expanded the working relationship with the Virginia Association of Free and Charitable Clinics, Bland Ministry Center and Appalachian Highlands Community Dental Center by credentialing several providers into the SFC network; including Crossover Healthcare Ministries, Lucy Core Dental Clinic, Western Tidewater Free Clinic, Bradley Free Clinic and Northern-Neck Middlesex Free Health Clinic. Work continues with Goochland Cares and Gloucester Matthews Care Clinic on credentialing providers.
- Continued the strong working relationships with the Virginia Department of Health, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, VCU Pediatric Dental Department, VCU School of Dentistry, VCU Health Systems, the Virginia Society of Oral & Maxillofacial Surgeons, American Cancer Association, CENEVIA, Old Dominion Dental Society, Virginia Dental Association, and the Virginia Dental Association Foundation.
- **Smiles For Children** staff kept in touch with their network providers through continual communication and created a COVID19 landing page on our website for **SFC** providers.

**Ongoing Initiatives**

**Fluoride Varnish Applications**

Fluoride varnish is an important measure in preventing cavities. State partnerships with Virginia dental providers, professional dental and medical organizations, and the contracted Medicaid managed care organizations, continue to increase the number of fluoride varnish applications for children under 3 years of age.

As a result of work with Virginia Department of Health’s “Bright Smiles for Babies” fluoride varnish program, there was a 67% increase in the number of children receiving fluoride varnish treatments – from 13,736 children in SFY16 to 22,907 in SFY21. The number of medical providers trained in applying fluoride varnish decreased slightly in 2021; however the volume of claims and claim dollar amounts continued to increase in SFY2021. The number of non-dental providers submitting claims has increased from 2016 to 2021 by 81% (see Table 1.) The slight decrease this year may be a result of the pandemic.

**Table 1 – DMAS Medical Claims Fluoride Varnish Applications**

SFY	Number of Medical Providers Submitting Claims	#of Claims
2021	697	33,186
2020	732	26,309
2019	714	25,646
2018	567	22,952
2017	504	22,916
2016	386	16,650

**Dental Coverage for Pregnant Women Enrolled in Medicaid and FAMIS MOMS**

As part of the BabySteps VA program, over 35,000 pregnant women have received a dental service. During SFY 2021, more than 5,300 pregnant women enrolled in SFC visited a dentist. With the addition of adult dental, women may no longer lose dental coverage at end of 60 day postpartum period but move to the adult benefit

**Silver Diamine Fluoride (SDF)**

Untreated dental cavities are associated with discomfort and toothaches. Traditionally, dentists treat cavities with fillings. Silver diamine fluoride is an alternative treatment to arrest cavities in a non-invasive manner. In SFY 2021, more than 6,200 children received one or more applications of SDF.

**Compliance with the Dental Periodicity Schedule**

In an effort to measure the effectiveness of the outreach program and compliance with the state and federal periodicity schedule, the Periodicity Compliance report gauges **SFC** member compliance with Early, Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) guidelines related to utilization of dental care.

- The report continues to indicate an upward trend in utilization of dental sealants for **SFC** members ages 2-12. This cost effective, preventive dentistry tool will help children remain cavity free.

from 56 providers in SFY 2021. As a result, DMAS recouped \$331,874.82 from 46 dental providers.

**Summary**

Virginia’s **Smiles For Children** program is a nationally recognized oral health program which offers benefits to over 1.5 million Virginians. In the past state fiscal year, DMAS continued its work to assure state-of-the-art services to Virginians through enhanced partnerships and access to quality dental care. The focus for the SFC program for much of the fiscal year included the development and implementation of the Adult Dental benefit which was effective July 1, 2021.

**Table 2: Utilization of Dental Sealants, Ages 2-12 Years**

State Fiscal Year	Preschool 2 – 6 Years	School Aged 6 – 12 Years	Adolescents 12 – 18 Years
SFY 2021	31%	76%	8.60%
SFY 2020	28.00%	74.60%	9.30%
SFY 2019	25.60%	73.50%	11.40%
SFY 2018	23.10%	70.60%	13.30%
SFY 2017	19.70%	66.40%	16.20%
SFY 2016	16.80%	61.30%	18.60%
SFY 2015	13.90%	56.00%	21.40%

**Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information**

DMAS requires DentaQuest to provide an annual update on preventive dental visits. The Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information SFC (HEDIS) 2021 data showed that 51% of the members, ages 2 – 20 years, had at least one dental visit, which is well above the HEDIS National Medicaid average of 42.79%. The **SFC** data showed the percentage of members with at least one dental visit was above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of the national HEDIS data (45.77

**DentaQuest Program Integrity**

DentaQuest, the dental benefit administrator for the **SFC** program, conducted audits of 2,261 member records