



COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS

Legislative Testimony

This sample testimony models how to apply recommended frames to formal documents and speaking opportunities. The statement opens with an appeal to two tested values, *Responsible Management* and *Targeted Justice*, to explain why oral health care matters to society and why we must address it by ensuring that all states include dental health benefits in Medicaid programs. The explanatory sections offer supporting information and use the *Keys to Oral Health* metaphor to describe why our current oral health care system isn't working for everyone and why it needs to change. The testimony concludes with a solution statement about how a policy change can improve outcomes for society.

Testimony of [Name of Person, Title]

[Organization, Location]

[Committee Name]

[Location], [Date]

Thank you Chair [Name], Vice Chair [Name], and members of this committee for inviting me to discuss the importance of investing in our oral health. Oral health is a key component of overall health and wellbeing; we must promote and protect it, and we can do that by enacting legislation that requires all states to cover oral health care for adult recipients of Medicaid, the government insurance program for the poor.

I join you today as a representative of the [organization name], an organization that focuses on improving the oral health of all people in [state]. We recognize that as our elected representatives, you reflect the desires of our citizens to use our nation's resources efficiently and effectively.

Opening with a tested value, such as this iteration of **Responsible Management**, can help move policy makers away from the cultural model of **Health Individualism**—seeing health as exclusively under one's personal control.

When it comes to oral health, we can stop problems with the mouth, teeth, gums, and tongue—and in fact, the whole body—before they start by increasing access to oral health insurance coverage. We can prevent oral conditions that can be serious and expensive to treat—and that can undermine overall health. If we invest in oral health prevention and treatment now, we will avoid costly problems later. Providing all adult recipients of Medicaid with dental coverage is a good use of our resources. It will allow us to make good on our commitment to provide health coverage to all.

Millions more people now have access to health insurance, thanks to new health care reform laws. But oral health care is often not included in available insurance plans, nor is it covered for all people by Medicaid. Medicaid programs are required to cover dental care for children and youth—but not adults. As a result, dental benefits for adults vary widely by state, and many people aren't able to get the care they need. Fully one-third of adults have no access to oral health care. As a result, emergency room visits for oral health problems are on the rise—costing the nation more than \$141 million in 2012.

We can prevent these kinds problems, and avoid associated costs, by providing all people with access to dental health coverage. Emergency rooms are the most expensive source of care and are ill equipped to handle oral health problems. It is therefore imperative that we use our resources more efficiently and effectively. If states provide all adult Medicaid recipients with dental coverage, we will reduce these shared costs by stopping problems before they start.

Framing the avoidable costs as ***Inaction Leads to Losses***—i.e., highlighting that failure to act results in unnecessary costs to society—was found to be more effective when engaging Republicans in oral health reform. An ***Action Leads to Gains*** approach—i.e., taking action leads to economic gains for society—was more effective with Democrats.

Call back to the ***Responsible Management*** value. This is most productive when used after making economic arguments and discussing avoidable costs.

To create a more effective system, we must ensure it meets the unique needs of different people. People have different needs when it comes to their oral health, and different situations call for different responses; a one-size-fits-all approach rarely works. This is especially true for low-income adults, who face high barriers to dental care.

A Medicaid dental benefit will help people overcome these barriers. Achieving good oral health is lot like going through a series of doors. Some doors lead to the availability of nutritious food, some to dentists who accept a variety of insurance plans, and others to health professionals who speak the same language as their patients. Some people have all the keys they need to unlock and move through every door, while others—particularly low-income people—don't have keys to one or all of them. If people don't have these keys, it doesn't matter how hard they push. Without the right keys, they can't access the doors to good oral health. One of the keys all people need is access to oral health care coverage. We can make sure all people have that key by reforming Medicaid. Enabling all people to get the care they need will support good oral health across our nation—and move our society toward a system that is more just, more efficient, and more responsible.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about the importance of a public benefit for oral health care in Medicaid. We welcome any questions you may have.

The tested value of **Targeted Justice** helps redirect thinking away from Individualism to more productive ways of thinking about how to live up to our collective responsibility to address inequities and provide access to care.

Using the **Keys to Oral Health** metaphor can explain the systemic and environmental influences on oral health. It was most productive in shifting people's perspectives away from the idea that oral health is a purely individual pursuit, while also emphasizing our collective efficacy—our belief that we can solve the problem.

Including recommended solutions boosts the public's collective sense of efficacy.