

Addressing Oral Health Among Pregnant Women with Apple Health



Scope: About 69,000 pregnant women are covered by Apple Health, but only about one-quarter access dental care.

Opportunity:

Women who get regular dental care during their pregnancy can improve their baby's oral health as well as their own.

Getting decay treated prior to giving birth can decrease the baby's risk for developing cavities, as mothers pass cavity causing bacteria to their babies through saliva. The more active the decay in the mother's mouth, the more likely that her baby will suffer from early childhood decay. The healthier the mother's mouth and the longer the transmission of cavity causing bacteria is delayed, the more likely children are to establish and maintain good oral health.

Pregnancy is an opportune time to address oral health.

- Pregnant women are more likely to develop oral health problems due to biological changes in their bodies.
- Mothers are highly receptive to health messages that encourage them to protect their babies' health, including oral health, through improved health behaviors and better nutrition.

Dental disease may cause complications during pregnancy that are expensive to treat and put babies at risk.

- Pre-Eclampsia: Gum disease may contribute to pre-eclampsia (i.e, dangerous high blood pressure) during pregnancy and put babies at risk.
- Gestational diabetes: Pregnant women who develop gestational diabetes face an increased risk for developing gum disease. Gum disease, in turn, makes controlling gestational diabetes more difficult. Rates of congenital defects increase with uncontrolled diabetes.

Proposal:

Modeled after the nationally recognized Access to Baby and Child Dentistry program:

- Enhance the Apple Health reimbursement rate for dental providers seeing pregnant women to increase the chances that these women will receive oral health care. Currently, even though dental care is safe during pregnancy, dentists often hesitate to treat pregnant women because of liability concerns. In reality, however, these concerns are unfounded.
- To qualify for the enhanced rates, require dentists to complete Washington Dental Service Foundation's continuing education course Oral Health from Birth: Using Evidence-Based Care to Manage and Treat Your Pregnant Patients.
- Provide case management services to pregnant women to address barriers that make it difficult for them to access care and provide education on the importance of oral health and how to prevent oral disease at home.

Addressing Oral Health Among Apple Health Patients with Diabetes



Scope: About 107,000 adults covered by Apple Health have diabetes.

Opportunity:

Ensuring that the oral health of diabetes patients is addressed presents a significant opportunity to improve health and save medical costs.

- Chronic inflammation and infection from gum disease can make it more difficult to control blood sugar levels.
- Uncontrolled blood sugar can cause serious and costly complications, including blindness, amputation, heart disease, and kidney disease.
- At least half of the medical costs associated with diabetes are due to hospitalizations that result from diabetic complications.
- Research has found that treating gum disease in patients with diabetes reduces hospitalizations by 40%, contributing to medical costs savings of \$2,800 per year, on average.
- If 18% of the Apple Health adults with diabetes receive gum disease treatment and this care results in a fraction of the medical cost savings cited in several studies, this could translate to \$10 million in savings to the state over the biennium.

Proposal:

Enhance Apple Health's reimbursement rate for dental providers seeing patients with diabetes to increase the chances that these patients will receive oral health care. Evidence from the Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD) program indicates that providers are more willing to see Apple Health patients when payment rates are enhanced, narrowing the gap with usual and customary rates. Because addressing gum disease is critical to achieving the health and cost savings outcomes, increase the number of allowable periodontal maintenance visit from 1 to 4 per year based on practice recommendations for treating active gum disease.