



January 29, 2021

Honorable Mark Pearson  
House Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs  
107 North Main Street  
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is JB Brackett and I am the Public Policy Assistant with NAMI NH, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I am writing on behalf of NAMI NH in support of HB 103, establishing a dental benefit under the state Medicaid program.

Oral health is an incredibly important aspect of both physical and mental health. Not only has poor oral health been linked to physical ailments such as heart disease, diabetes, and even cancer; there is also a significant link between poor oral health and poor mental health. Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey reported that half of all people with depression rated their teeth condition as fair or poor. The same survey also showed poor oral health is linked to things like anxiety, stress, and loneliness.

Many psychiatric disorders can lead to poor oral health for a variety of reasons, most commonly that individuals with mental illness can often lose track of their personal hygiene and physical health maintenance. It is also more challenging for individuals with mental illness to make and keep appointments with physical and oral health professionals, due to the nature of these conditions. Certain mental illnesses, such as depression, can also physically manifest in a compromised immune system, leaving individuals more vulnerable to oral health ailments. Finally, access to oral healthcare is challenging as it is often not included under the same insurance plan as physical healthcare. As a result, people with mental illness are 2.7 times more likely to lose their teeth.

According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, just under half of the people enrolled in a Medicaid program have one or more diagnosable mental illnesses. Establishing a dental benefit under the Medicaid program would provide more accessible oral healthcare, removing a major barrier between people with mental illness and good oral health. Removing this barrier and allowing more folks to easily access oral healthcare would result in higher confidence in folks with mental illness; not only could this result in better outcomes of mental health recovery, but in addition, a higher likelihood of people finding jobs.

In short, establishing a dental benefit under the state Medicaid program would be extremely beneficial not only to individuals living with mental illness, but to the state as a whole. I urge you to vote this bill as ought to pass.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "JB Brackett".

JB Brackett  
Public Policy Assistant  
NAMI NH

*Find Help, Find Hope.*

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