



February 2, 2022

Honorable Chairman Jeb Bradley
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Legislate Office Building Room 101
North Main St., Concord, NH 03301

RE: NAMI NH Support of SB 422

Dear Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Holly Stevens, and I am the Director of Public Policy at NAMI New Hampshire, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. NAMI NH is a non-profit, non-partisan, grassroots organization whose mission is to improve the lives of all people impacted by mental illness and suicide through support, education and advocacy. On behalf of NAMI NH, I am here today to speak in support of SB 422, establishing an adult 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

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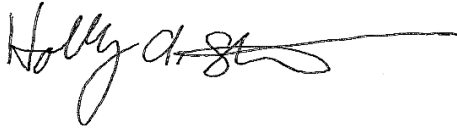
NAMI New Hampshire • 85 North State Street • Concord, NH 03301

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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 black ink, appearing to read "Holly A. Stevens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Holly A. Stevens, Esq.