



## Executive Summary

In 2022, the Office of the Health Care Advocate (HCA) helped 126 Vermonters who had concerns about dental care. Vermonters described a range of problems, including:

- The inability to find a dentist nearby, or anywhere in Vermont, who would accept their insurance
- How to pay for dental care
- Where to find and how to pay for emergency dental treatment

## Difficulty finding a dentist

In 2022, advocates helped 114 people who called to express their concern about finding a dentist. They often heard from Vermonters who had made countless calls to dental practices.

### **Anthony and Sabrina are waiting 10 months for care.**

Anthony and Sabrina, ages 11 and 9, are siblings and have been uninsured for years. Their parents want them to see a dentist for preventive care. After calling multiple dentists and clinics in the area, they finally got appointments for the kids 10 months in the future. Their only option is to go to an affordable (discounted) clinic.

## Delayed care

The HCA also talked to 48 individuals who were experiencing a delay in accessing dental care. In some cases, it was because they could not find a dentist, in others, it was because they couldn't pay for the care they needed.

Delays in care can be devastating in the near term, leading to an immediate loss in quality of life, as well as lost wages due to missed work.

Delayed care can also have long-term unintended consequences, setting individuals up for increased dental problems and costs down the road.

As a last resort in emergency situations, advocates steer callers to their local emergency room if the pain or infection becomes unbearable.

## Inability to afford dental services

The majority of clients - 121 individuals - who called the HCA about dental care were worried about how they would afford the services they needed or that were recommended by their dentist. For clients with Medicaid, many were concerned about "hitting the cap" - an annual \$1,000 limit on dental expenses set by the State of Vermont for all non-pregnant adults.\*

\*Note: The 2023 Legislature may increase the cap to \$1500 along with raising the provider reimbursement rate. This "increase" would mean that Vermonters can buy the same amount of dental services each year, but Vermonters will still 'hit the cap.'

## Vermonters' Voices



### **Jackson needs a root canal but can't find a dentist who will accept Medicaid.**

Jackson has a tooth infection that is causing horrific pain. His dentist thinks the tooth can be saved with a root canal, but Jackson can't find a dentist who will take Medicaid. He already has several missing teeth. If he can't get the root canal, he might lose this tooth and need more invasive and costly treatment in the future.

## Urgent or emergent dental need

Advocates helped 48 Vermonters who called with a dental emergency or urgent dental need. They needed extractions (including emergency extractions of wisdom teeth), root canals, crowns, implants and dentures.

## Non-covered services

Advocates fielded a number of calls about non-covered services, such as dentures, implants, and orthodontia. Dentures can cost many thousands of dollars, and are not covered by Medicaid or Medicare.

There are few resources available to pay for dentures and it is difficult to find a dental clinic that will discount the service. The HCA is unaware of any clinics that offer a sliding scale for orthodontia.

Vermonters need the following services from Medicaid, but coverage is limited or non-existent:

- **Orthodontia:** Medicaid covers orthodontia in limited instances for children and pregnant women only.
- **Implants:** Medicaid does not cover implants, which are increasingly suggested as an alternative to dentures.
- **Dentures:** Medicaid does not cover dentures.

## How to get help

The HCA's webpage includes a list of dental clinics that offer free and sliding-scale discounts to low-income Vermonters.

[www.vtlawhelp.org/dental-services](http://www.vtlawhelp.org/dental-services)

**Cindy has been 2 years without teeth and needs dentures.**

Cindy is calling the HCA to see if there is financial help for Vermonters who need dentures. She's had no teeth for two years and is embarrassed to go out in public.

She's having difficulty eating. She can't afford to pay thousands of dollars for dentures.

**Vermonters reported broken teeth, infections, inability to chew solid foods and speak clearly, as well as accompanying pain and discomfort.**

## Insurance Type

Medicare (All Types: Original, Part C, Employer Wrap)  
16%

None/Other/ Unknown  
20%

In 2022, the majority of Vermonters who called about dental issues had Medicaid. However, the HCA received calls from people with all types of insurance.

