



Summer 2025: Nebraska Medicaid Dental Snapshot

August 2025 Update

Access to dental care remains an urgent and often out-of-reach need for Nebraskans with Medicaid coverage. Recent reports show that children and adults with Medicaid coverage continue to struggle to find providers who are accepting new Nebraska Medicaid patients.¹ The result is that folks delay or forgo care, health outcomes worsen, and care becomes more expensive. For example, if Nebraskans are not able to get the preventive care they need, they may wait until their oral health needs are urgent and seek treatment at an Emergency Room. While emergency treatment may be available in this setting, actual resolution of an oral health issue is unlikely to be achieved in an ER.²

Nebraskans Highlight Barriers to Medicaid Dental Care

Nebraskans recently shared the impact of restrictions on access to oral health care:

- **Sierra**, a mother of three, describes it this way: “At 19, my provider refused services and said they stopped taking Medicaid. I had to wait 10 years for oral care.”
- Prior to having Medicaid, **Felicia**’s only access to healthcare was through free clinics. Even with Medicaid coverage, dental care still remains difficult to obtain. Despite needing a regular check-up, she has not been to the dentist in many years. She has been trying to obtain an appointment with a dentist who accepts Medicaid since the beginning of the year, but has been unable to book an appointment because many offices are booked out for months in advance.
- Read more Nebraskans’ stories about access to health care [here](#).

Barriers to accessing Medicaid dental care further exacerbate dental problems for those reentering communities after incarceration. A 2025 article from the Nebraska News Service revealed that people who have been incarcerated lack access to basic dental care while incarcerated,³ meaning they often have high oral health needs upon reentry. While Nebraskans leaving correctional facilities are nearly always eligible for Medicaid expansion enrollment upon reentry, barriers to accessing a Medicaid dental provider can make long-ignored issues even worse for many Nebraskans reentering.

A 2024 survey showed Nebraska dental providers acknowledge barriers to treating Medicaid patients, the highest of which is the low reimbursement rate for Medicaid services (82.8%).⁴ While 69% of Nebraska dentists surveyed reported providing any Medicaid dental services in the last 12 months, of those, the average Medicaid patient volume was under 25%.⁵ Additional steps need to be taken to increase the number of dentists providing care to Nebraskans with Medicaid and to increase the Medicaid patient volume per dentist.

More action is necessary to ensure Nebraskans with Medicaid have consistent and reliable access to dental care.

1. Meghan O'Brien, Nebraska Public Media, *Many Nebraskans are Struggling to Find Dental Coverage, Even with More Dentists Accepting Medicaid*, Apr. 2, 2025, <https://nebraskapublicmedia.org/en/news/news-articles/many-nebraskans-are-struggling-to-find-dental-coverage-even-with-more-dentists-accepting-medicaid/>.

2. Heart Ministry Center, *Oral Health in North Omaha*, July 1, 2025, <https://heartministrycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/ORAL-HEALTH-IN-NORTH-OMAHA-Report-06.2025.pdf>, p. 4; “30% (of interviewees) reported accessing the emergency room in an attempt to receive treatment for their oral health problem. All of these interviewees reported that they had accessed the emergency room, but their oral health problem was not resolved there.”

3. Meghan O'Brien, Nebraska News Service, *'Extract it, or Live with it' Dental Care in Nebraska Prisons Lacking*, May 30, 2025, https://www.nebraskanewsservice.net/investigative/2025/nebraska_prisons/dental-care-in-nebraska-prisons-lacking/article_f9f764b5-2f21-40a4-bd7d-5d8c08043c57.html.

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Recent Changes to Access to Dental Care for Medicaid Enrollees

In 2024 and 2025, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Nebraska Legislature made a number of changes which impact access to dental care, including:



Removal of the \$750 Adult Dental Cap.

Caps on expenditures for oral health services limit the potential to restore or maintain Medicaid enrollees' oral health to prevent more severe, costly, and emergent disease. Removing the cap has increased access to the most appropriate services and care and improved relationships between patients and providers.



Reimbursement for Public Health Dental Hygienists (PHDH).

This change newly allows for Medicaid reimbursement of PHDH, an independent provider type, which will expand access to dental services. PHDHs provide services in a wide range of community settings, including hospitals, school-based programs, public health clinics, and others. Leading up to this change, the number of PHDHs and the number of people they were able to reach with services was already increasing.⁶ Now with Medicaid reimbursement available for this provider type, the dental services they provide can reach even further.



Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact.

Two bills were consolidated and passed during the 2025 Nebraska Legislative session, [LB83](#) (Rountree) and [LB148](#) (Hansen), which will establish a licensure compact to facilitate interstate practice of dentistry and dental hygiene. The compact is intended to assist dental professionals who move between states to more quickly and easily begin providing services in the new state. The bill passed and was signed into law on April 14, 2025.



Medicaid Dental Provider Rate Increase.

[LB358](#) (Walz) aimed to increase reimbursement rates by 25%. The bill was amended to increase rates by 12.5% and was passed and signed into law on April 16, 2024.



Removal of Teledentistry

The flexibility and portability possible with telehealth presents opportunities for oral health providers to expand their reach and meet patients in their communities. Instead of eliminating these opportunities, DHHS should maximize use of teledentistry to improve access to care.

4. American Dental Association Health Policy Institute, *Survey of Medicaid Beneficiaries and Survey of Dentist Opinions on Medicaid - Results for Nebraska*, 2024, p. 14, https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada/ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/Survey_Dentists_Medicaid_Beneficiaries_Nebraska.pdf.

5. *Id.* at 13.

6. Nebraska Public Health Authorization Dental Services and Evaluation Report, Sept. 15, 2024, https://nebraskalegislature.gov/FloorDocs/108/PDF/Agencies/Health_and_Human_Services_Department_of/754_20240923-084515.pdf.



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Other changes were proposed during the 2025 Nebraska Legislative session which would impact access to dental care but have not passed yet and are still pending:

- [LB27](#) (Ballard) - this bill would establish a new educational loan repayment program for dentists who see a certain number or percentage of Medicaid patients as an incentive for increased provider participation in Nebraska Medicaid. The bill was assigned to the Health and Human Services Committee and had a hearing on January 22, 2025, but did not advance during the 2025 session.
- [LB146](#) (Ibach) - this bill would increase dental provider Medicaid reimbursement rates by 12.5% to incentivize provider participation in Nebraska Medicaid. The bill was assigned to the Appropriations Committee and had a hearing on March 11, 2025, but did not advance during the 2025 session.
- Additionally, two 2025 interim studies concern access to dental care: [LR221](#) (Fredrickson) and [LR231](#) (Riepe).

Federal Budget Cuts Threaten Access to Oral Health Care

In July 2025, Congress passed and the President signed into law a budget reconciliation bill that will devastate programs that provide access to health care and food for tens of thousands of Nebraskans. These cuts will severely restrict or eliminate access to care while drastically increasing costs for states. The Medicaid cuts alone could cause [up to 55,000 Nebraskans](#) to lose health coverage and the state could lose up to [\\$4 billion in federal Medicaid funding over the next 10 years](#). The bill also attacks Nebraska's voter-approved Medicaid expansion – which provides more than 65,000 Nebraskans with life-saving health care coverage – by imposing unnecessary work requirements that make up to 40,000 Nebraskans at risk of losing their health care.

Even with Medicaid coverage and all the progress our state has made in recent years, Nebraskans are still struggling to access dental services. When Nebraskans lose coverage due to these cuts, dental care will become even further out of reach. Additionally, dental coverage for adults in Medicaid is categorized as an “optional” service, and could be at risk due to these budget cuts. Even though oral health is essential to overall health, access to dental services could be at risk considering these budget cuts.

But the fight continues. Nebraskans across the state will need to work together to ensure that our state leaders mitigate as much harm as possible caused by this sweeping piece of legislation.