



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Human Services
Senate Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection and Health
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By

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And

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With

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SB 27 – RELATING TO MAKING AN APPROPRIATION TO RESTORE BASIC ADULT DENTAL BENEFITS TO MEDICAID ENROLLEES

Chairs Green and Baker, Vice-Chairs Chang and Nishihara and members of the committees, UH leadership wish to submit this testimony in strong support of SB 27. This bill would appropriate monies to restore basic adult dental benefits to Medicaid enrollees.

The Native Hawaiian Health Task Force was created during the 2014 legislative session with the goals of articulating priority areas that will help advance health equity for Native Hawaiians, and in turn, the health of Hawai'i's entire population. The task force recently presented its findings as well as 16 specific recommendations to improve the health of Native Hawaiians. One of these 16 recommendations was to restore basic adult dental benefits to Medicaid enrollees.

The University of Hawai'i supports this bill for numerous reasons:

- Poor oral health affects a person's ability to eat, speak, work, communicate, and learn. Unlike other states, Hawai'i does not have an ongoing and routine system for assessing the oral health of its residents - there is no dental public health program with the State Department of Health.
- Hawai'i received a failing grade of "F" in three recent oral health report cards published by The Pew Center. According to the Department of Health's Hawai'i Oral Health: Key Findings report published in August 2015, there are substantial dental health disparities among low-income residents, pregnant women, neighbor island counties.

- Fluoride added to community drinking water sources is a safe, inexpensive and extremely effective method of preventing tooth decay across all age groups. However, only 11% of Hawai'i residents have fluoridated water compared to 75% for the United States as a whole.
- Only 52% of low-income adults in Hawai'i saw a dentist, compared to 82% of high-income adults. Fifty-one percent (51%) of low-income adults lost teeth due to dental disease, while only 32% of high-income adults did so.
- Because many Hawai'i residents are unable to afford dental care or schedule a dental appointment, they end up seeking care at a hospital emergency department, although dental services are not generally available there. In 2012, there were more than 3,000 emergency room visits due to preventable dental problems, 67% more than in 2006. As a result, aggregate hospital charges for dental emergency visits were \$8,500,000, compared to \$4,000,000 in 2006, due in part to the increased number of visits.

Thank you for your consideration.