

December 14, 2020

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President-Elect of the United States

The Honorable Kamala Harris  
Vice President-Elect of the United States

Dear President-Elect Biden and Vice President-Elect Harris:

The American Dental Association (ADA) and its more than 163,000 dentist members is standing by to support your transition efforts in preparation for leading the federal government in January.

We know you share our passion for helping veterans, so we wanted to make you and your VA transition team aware of an important VA project. The VA Pilot Program for Dental Health Care Access's objective is to improve overall health by increasing access to dental services for enrolled veterans currently ineligible for dental services through the VA.

The VA has limited authority to furnish outpatient dental care. Generally, veterans must either have a dental issue that is service connected or qualify based on narrow criteria (e.g., the veteran is a former prisoner of war, the veteran has a service-connected disability rated as total, or treatment is medically necessary in preparation for hospital admission or for a veteran otherwise receiving VA care or services or reasonably necessary to complete dental care that began while the veteran was receiving hospital care). As per the Federal Register Notice of Intent for this pilot program, the VA provides dental services on an annual basis to approximately only eight percent of veterans who are enrolled in the VA health care system.

The VA pilot program stresses the fact that oral health is fundamental to a person's overall health. Poor oral health can have a significant negative effect on overall health. Neglecting oral health can lead to health problems, including oral cancer, and oral health is a window to your overall health.

The anticipated impact of the pilot is to improve the quality of oral health for veterans while decreasing health care related costs associated with provision of emergency care. Poor oral health is correlated with potentially avoidable and costly emergency department (ED) visits, causing more than two million visits to the ED each year. The VA believes there is an opportunity for cost savings to be realized through reduction of ED utilization caused by increasing access to dental care. The ADA is committed to supporting the VA's goal to lessen ED visits and enhance the oral health of our veterans.

In support of our veterans, ADA adopted new policy in 2020 that aligns with the VA's dental pilot program. Specifically, we support the federal authorization of administrative support resources within the Veterans Administration Medical Centers to assist veterans to identify and utilize dental services offered by federally qualified health centers, not for profit dental care facilities, and volunteer dental professionals. Furthermore, the ADA supports the work

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of component and constituent dental associations, dental organizations, societies and dentists to develop new programs with outreach strategies to assist veterans with unmet dental treatment needs, and to serve as a resource in finding dental homes for veterans.

In support of the pilot program, the ADA is currently collaborating with the VA Innovation Center. We are providing the VA with advisory guidance on all aspects of the pilot and fostering partnerships for the facilitation of veteran dental services. Developing alliances with private dental offices, other organizations, and Federally Qualified Health Centers will be critical to the success of this effort.

The ADA fully supports the VA's Pilot Program for Dental Health Care Access and hopes your transition team recommends continuation of this essential project. Our veterans deserve it.

We look forward to continuing to work with the VA on the pilot program and would welcome the opportunity to meet with your team to further discuss it. Please contact Dr. Robert Mitton, the ADA's manager of legislative and regulatory policy, at [mittonr@ada.org](mailto:mittonr@ada.org).

Sincerely,

Daniel J. Klemmedson, D.D.S., M.D.  
President

Kathleen T. O'Loughlin, D.M.D., M.P.H.  
Executive Director

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