



Senate Human Services Committee
SB 2231
Tuesday, January 28, 2025

Chairwoman Lee, Vice Chair Weston and honorable members of the Senate Human Services, my name is Nadine Boe and I am CEO of Northland Health Centers. I'm here today in support of SB 2231 if amended to include dental treatment for adults on Medicaid Expansion.

Northland Health Centers serves eight communities in the central and northern areas of the state, including Bismarck, Turtle Lake, McClusky, Minot, Rolette, St. John, Bowbells, and Ray. We offer dental care in Turtle Lake, Minot, and as of early this year, Ray. We provide medical, dental and behavioral health services to all community residents, regardless of insurance status and ability to pay. In 2023, we served 6,175 patients with 17,329 total visits. About one quarter of our patients are covered by Medicaid. Of the remainder, about 13 percent are covered by Medicare, which does not have dental coverage included, and 30 percent are uninsured. 32 percent of our patients have private health coverage.

For many Medicaid and non-covered recipients, access to dental care is nearly impossible. In North Dakota and across the country, we see people forced to choose between paying rent, putting food on the table, or getting a painful tooth treated. The result? They delay care until it becomes an emergency. Instead of a simple filling, they end up in the emergency room—where they can't get the treatment they truly need, only temporary pain relief and a referral they often can't afford to follow up on. In my own work at Northland, we see firsthand how this lack of coverage impacts real people—parents who can't work because of an untreated infection, seniors who can't eat properly due to missing teeth, and young adults starting their careers already facing major dental problems they can't afford to fix.

Adding a comprehensive dental benefit to Medicaid expansion is the fiscally responsible thing to do. Preventative dental care is far more cost-effective than waiting until problems escalate into emergencies. Every dollar invested in preventive oral health services can save several dollars in avoided emergency room visits and complicated medical treatments.

States that have expanded dental benefits under Medicaid have seen improved health outcomes and reduced long-term health costs. When people have access to routine dental care, they stay healthier, they miss fewer days of work, and they avoid costly emergency interventions.

We have the opportunity to make a real, lasting impact by ensuring that dental care is included in Medicaid expansion. Let's invest in preventive care, let's reduce avoidable medical costs, and most importantly, let's give people the dignity of a healthy smile and a pain-free life.