

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Work in progress: Audit description

Cost Savings in Medicaid Fluoride Treatment Payments

Fluoride is used to reduce the risk of tooth decay. About two-thirds of the U.S. population is served by fluoridated water systems, and toothpastes commonly contain fluoride. Dentists often apply topical fluoride treatments, and may prescribe fluoride supplements to patients with low exposure to fluoride. The American Dental Association and other professional associations recommend patients receive fluoride treatments two to four times a year, with more frequent applications reserved for higher-risk patients.

In Washington, the Health Care Authority administers Medicaid health insurance to nearly 2 million adults and children. Most Medicaid clients have access to dental services, including topical fluoride treatments.

Most neighboring states allow Medicaid clients up to two fluoride treatments a year, with exceptions for higher-risk patients. In Washington, Medicaid clients also receive up to two topical fluoride applications a year, with exceptions for higher risk patients, per provider or clinic. Because of the “per provider or clinic” provision, clients can receive an unlimited number of treatments as long as they go to different providers.

Scope and objectives

This audit will identify possible cost savings in fluoride treatments. It will determine how much money Washington could save if the Health Care Authority followed state regulations and leading practices. To do this, the audit will answer the following questions:

- Is the Health Care Authority paying for dental fluoride treatments according to state regulations?
- Could Washington’s Medicaid program save money by following leading practices for the number of beneficial dental fluoride treatments?

Timing

We plan to publish the audit results in late summer 2019.



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