



December 11, 2019

Dr. Mark Ghaly  
Director, California Health and Human Services Agency  
1600 9th Street, Suite 460  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
*Emailed to EngAGE@aging.ca.gov*

**RE: Executive Order N-14-19, California's Master Plan on Aging**

On behalf of its more than 27,000 member dentists, the California Dental Association (CDA) is pleased to provide comments to the Stakeholder Advisory Committee for the California Master Plan on Aging. Focusing on the needs of aging Californians is incredibly important and timely. According to a 2015 Public Policy Institute of California report, the over-65 population is expected to be 87 percent higher in 2030 than in 2012, increasing by more than four million people. Additionally, this population is expected to grow more racially and ethnically diverse and be comprised of more seniors who are single and/or childless than ever before. Meeting the needs of this population presents both a challenge and opportunity and CDA appreciates the invitation to contribute to this important work.

Most dental disease is preventable and there is strong evidence that oral health significantly affects overall health. Poor oral health can also significantly impact quality of life, including such things as homelessness, nutritional status, and the management of chronic diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular conditions. CDA actively advocates for access to oral health care for the 13 million low-income individuals who receive dental benefits through Medi-Cal. Elders, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and others who are disproportionately living in poverty often access these programs for the support and care they need to be healthy, active members of society and are at greatest risk of losing access to these services if California waivers on its commitment to provide adult dental care in Medi-Cal.

CDA has worked closely with the Department of Health Care Services to improve the Medi-Cal dental program and is pleased with the advances in program benefits and reimbursement levels that have been made in recent years. Both appropriate benefits and sustainable reimbursement are essential for an accessible and effective program and CDA commends DHCS for its work to achieve these improvements.

It is also important to recognize that the aging process often leads individuals over time to become dependent on others for their daily care. Whether daily care is provided by a home health care provider or occurs in an elder-care living facility (e.g. assisted living, ICF, SNF) the result is often a neglect of oral health needs, as other needs are more easily visible and become the priority. It is essential that programs, policies and caregiver training for elders maintain an active focus on the essential need for adequate daily and ongoing oral health care.

Notwithstanding the many pressing concerns that must be addressed for older Californians, including access to affordable housing, transportation and fresh foods, CDA recommends that the advisory committee actively recognize the crucial role good oral health has for overall health and wellbeing by prioritizing access to dental benefits and dental disease management services for this vulnerable population. Additionally, noting that there is not a dentist on the advisory committee, CDA urges the committee to work directly with us to solicit the expertise of dental professionals.

We know that there is much work to be done, are excited by the prospect of focusing on a growing and at-risk portion of our California community, and look forward to contributing to this important work. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [Richard.Stapler@cda.org](mailto:Richard.Stapler@cda.org) or 916.554.4905 if you have questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Stapler', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Stapler  
Vice President, Public Affairs