



## Incentives to Attract Dentists to Practice in Medicaid & Underserved Areas

### Overview and Background Facts:

By definition, underserved areas have an insufficient supply of dentists to meet the needs of either the general population of the area, or a specific population such as Medicaid. Illinois has 44 counties designated as a Dental HPSA because of Medicaid access.

The Dental Student Grant Act (110 ILCS 925) was repealed in 2000. Grants were used for underrepresented minority students to enter the dental profession.

IDPH operates the Health Professional Loan Repayment Program. The program is 50% funded by federal government, with a 50% local community match. No Illinois state general revenue funds currently support this program. It is the same as the federal loan repayment program for medical and dental practitioners, except they must work for a not-for-profit organization, and the employer has to contribute half of the loan repayment amount (up to \$25,000) over a two-year period. The National Health Service Corps has a loan repayment program, but it has limitations and is not very flexible.

The Illinois General Assembly has established the Joint Task Force on Rural Health to look at ways to direct health care services to rural underserved areas of Illinois.

Many rural areas lack a sufficient supply of dental specialists.

On average, Medicaid reimbursement to the dentists is less than the cost of providing the care.

### Comments:

Medicaid rate increases to near normal levels have attracted dentists to participate in Medicaid programs in other states.

Private insurance companies already offer additional, higher payments to attract specialists to participate in their managed care networks.

Many rural areas have only a few dental specialists. Medicaid needs to consider reimbursing any dentist in these areas at market rates to attract them to participate in Medicaid. To fund these rate increases, Medicaid could simply cost-shift the savings that they currently spend to transport patients to a dentist or specialist.

The Illinois Dept. of Public Health has not received funding to offer dental scholarships or state-financed loan repayment programs for over 10 years even though statutory authority to grant them already exists.

Dental schools have begun training dental students through outreach programs to give them a perspective on the needs of the underserved.

### ISDS Position Statement:

Higher reimbursement is needed to attract dentists to participate in the Medicaid program especially in certain rural areas. In order to attract dentists to provide care to Medicaid patients, ISDS supports the offering of incentives in certain designated counties where no general dentists currently participate in the program. In certain counties that have little to no specialty care, ISDS supports incentives to selected specialties to encourage them to participate in the program.

The Illinois legislature should appropriate funds to the Illinois Department of Public Health to provide dental scholarships and loan repayment programs to aid in attracting dentists to practice in underserved areas.