

Good day, everyone. My name is James Mancini, and I am a general dentist living in Pittsburgh, PA. I have practiced dentistry in Pennsylvania for 37 years. I graduated from the University Of pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine in 1986. For the past 20+ years, I have practiced as a Rural Public Health Dentist in Pennsylvania. I am formerly the Clinical Director of the McKean County Dental Center, located in Bradford, PA from 2000 to 2010. After that, I became the Clinical Director for the Salvation Army Dental Centers from 2010 until 2020. Those centers were located in Oil City (Venango County) and Johnstown (Cambria County). Since 2020, I have been employed at Meadville Dental Center, part of the Meadville Health System. Currently, I serve as the Clinical Director for Meadville Dental Center. In addition to those positions, I have been very active in other aspects of dentistry. I currently am a member of the Governor's Advisory Council on the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Organized Dentistry is also part of my professional resume. In Pennsylvania, I am a member of the Pennsylvania Dental Association (PDA). In this organization, I serve as a trustee for the 9th district of PA, which encompasses the northwest corner of our state. The PDA has a committee dedicated to Access to Care issues within our state, of which I am a member. Also, I serve on the PDA Workforce Taskforce. As a member of the American Dental Association (ADA), I serve as the Chair of the Council on Advocacy for Access and Prevention. This council deals with the public side of the ADA, working with groups across the country on issues with Access to Care.

Access to Care in Pennsylvania, for those in our state who use the state Medicaid program as their primary source of health and dental care, is becoming very difficult to navigate. Especially in rural Pennsylvania. There has been a steady decline over the past decade of dentists in our state. This decline was further exasperated by the COVID Pandemic. Two main sources of data that has tracked this decline come from either of these sources: the ADA Health Policy Institute (HPI) and the Pennsylvania Coalition of Oral Health (PCOH). In addition, the PDA Workforce Taskforce has also completed research into this decline and recently presented to the PDA leadership a concern with this issue.

As many of you know, a dentist in Pennsylvania must enroll in the Medicaid system to be eligible to treat patients covered by the Medicaid program. The population of dentists in the Medicaid system in Pennsylvania has been declining for years, to the point that the remaining offices within this system are being overwhelmed with patients, looking for a provider within their insurance coverage. The following is a list of general points that deal with the overall population of dentists in Pennsylvania, as well the subset of dentists in Pennsylvania that accept Medicaid in their offices:

- 1) Pennsylvania has 67 counties. According to the Health Resources and Services administration (HRSA), at least 31 of these counties are considered to be rural. As of 2021 there are ½ as many dentists located in rural counties than urban counties. In addition, of the total number of dentists in Pennsylvania, ½ of all dentists are age 55 or older. In rural counties, 25% of all dentists are age 65 and older. (HPI)
- 2) Medicaid participation within our state is below 23% of all dentists that submit more than 1000 claims per year in treatment. All phases of dental practice are represented in this survey, but of particular distress is the number of Pediatric Dental Specialists. There are between 5 and 10 counties in Pennsylvania that have 1 or zero Medicaid General Dentists. However, there are 39 Counties in Pennsylvania that do not have a pediatric dental specialists within their borders. And within this group, ¾ of these 39 counties do not have a pediatric specialist in any county that touches their borders. For reference, children make up about 1/3 all the almost 3,000,000 Medicaid recipients in Pennsylvania. (PCOH)

Pennsylvania has 3 Dental Schools within the borders (Pitt, Temple and Penn), as well as a one year program that serves as the fourth year for students of LECOM University (located in Erie). These programs provide treatment for those enrolled in Medicaid, and have been doing so for years. However, no such programs exists in rural Pennsylvania. The bulk of dental treatment for Medicaid enrollees is accomplished at Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC's) and Rural Health Centers (RHC's). These are the programs that see the vast majority of Medicaid patient's, and these are the programs that are greatly affected by the loss of similar programs across the state. All of these programs are subject to the reimbursement rates within the Medicaid system, and there are several that have closed in recent years. Because these programs rely on Medicaid reimbursement for their funding, they are unable to compete for the graduates of the dental schools within our state. Since many dental students are graduating with a large debt from student loans, they must find an avenue to support themselves, their families and the repayment of these loans. Even though there are some avenues of loan repayment, these avenues are very small and not guaranteed. Therefore, the rural health centers are at a tremendous disadvantage for providers in our state. It is hard enough to recruit a student from Pittsburgh or Philadelphia to come to areas such as Coudersport, Bradford, Johnstown or any other rural municipality in Pennsylvania. But to then try to compete with the salary offered in the larger cities is crushing the Medicaid workforce in our state.

I will specifically focus on my program at Meadville Dental Center. We currently have approximately 18,000 patients served by two dentists. Our volume has increased steadily over the past 4 years. This program has been in existence for over 30 years. But our volume continues to climb as other dental programs focusing on the Medicaid population have closed or do not accept new patients anymore (again due to overwhelming volume). Where as previously, our patients were mostly from Crawford county, we now draw patients from much further. The closure of the Salvation Army Dental Center in Oil City has greatly increased the number of patient's coming from Venango County. This group now accounts for over 60% of our new patients and represents over 20 % of our overall population. We now also have a large influx of patients coming from Warren and McKean counties, again, due to the closure of the Medicaid dental programs in those counties. Many patients come to our office after traveling for an hour or more. And as mentioned earlier, should a child need advanced care at my facility, the nearest pediatric practice with the capability to handle difficult dental issues in the younger population is Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, a drive of over 90 + miles for my patients and their families.

In closing, I am asking for help. Legislative help. We, the rural Medicaid dental providers in Pennsylvania, are being overwhelmed. We need to be able to compete to hire more dentists and staff at our facilities to help treat the millions of Pennsylvanians who need dental care. I shudder to think what is going to happen when I reach the end of my career and retire. I'm not sure who is going to take my place or who is going to take care of my patients. Dental Care is connected to overall Health care. Pennsylvanians need dental care, especially those who are most vulnerable. Please help me continue to serve those in our state that need my assistance. Thank you.

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