

# The Journal of the Michigan Dental Association

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Volume 105 | Number 1

Article 8

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1-1-2023

## Advocacy Spotlight: MDA's Legislative Priorities for 2023

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### Recommended Citation

Katibai, Neema JD (2023) "Advocacy Spotlight: MDA's Legislative Priorities for 2023," *The Journal of the Michigan Dental Association*: Vol. 105: No. 1, Article 8.

Available at: <https://commons.ada.org/journalmichigandentalassociation/vol105/iss1/8>

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# Here Are the MDA's Legislative Priorities for 2023

By Neema Katibaj, JD  
MDA Manager of Government/Insurance Affairs

**T**he MDA establishes legislative priorities on an annual basis to inform legislators about the issues that are most important to dentists in Michigan. These priorities

are developed by the MDA Committee on Governmental and Insurance Affairs as well as by the MDA Board of Trustees, working with advocacy staff.

And while these priorities are important, and significant, they are not the exclusive focus of the MDA's legislative advocacy efforts. Every year brings new and unexpected opportunities in the Legislature — which we saw with the historic adult dental Medicaid reform in 2022.

Also, our MDA priorities often span over several years, as we work with members to identify issues, educate the public about the issue, and work with stakeholders and legislators to find solutions that prioritize the needs of our members as well as the oral health of the public.

Take a look at the list below — here's what the MDA will be working on in 2023!

## Dental loss ratio

By now, you've probably heard about the success of Question 2 in the Massachusetts November election, which established a loss ratio of 83% for dental insurance companies. This approval by Massachusetts voters means that, starting in 2024, dental insurance companies in that state will have to demonstrate that at least 83% of patient premiums are used for patient care. If that threshold is not met, the insurance company must issue a refund to the plan purchaser for the difference between what is actually spent on care and 83% of premiums.

Throughout 2023, Massachusetts will be determining how to implement the loss ratio. The MDA will monitor this closely. We will also be working closely with the American Dental Association, the Massachusetts Dental Society, and our members to ensure we are pursuing the best strategy here in our state regarding dental loss ratio to maximize positive impacts for our members.

## Network leasing transparency

Network leasing is a mechanism that allows insurance companies to lease their provider networks to each other, often without much notice given to providers. Throughout 2022 the MDA worked closely with stakeholders to develop draft legislation that would improve transparency, provide dentists with an "opt-out" to being leased by an insurance company with which they participate, and requiring regular disclosures of all networks that a provider participates with. In 2023, the MDA will be working with legislators to introduce legislation addressing these issues.



Katibaj

## Teledentistry policy

Telehealth services are, and will continue to be, a significant focus of policy development in the health care and technology sectors. While there is no doubt that dental care must eventually be delivered in person to be legitimate, there is also no doubt that the ability to remotely interact with patients can significantly enhance the efficiency in which quality care is provided.

The MDA is working with legislators to introduce proposed legislation that would create common-sense regulations for teledentistry. The legislation will focus on protecting patient safety and privacy, mitigating professional liability, ensuring the standard of care and scope of practice apply as they would in person, and prohibiting fee discrimination solely based on services being provided via telehealth.

## State budget

The 2022 state budget was historic for dentistry, with \$85 million invested into redesigning Adult Dental Medicaid benefits and raising Adult Medicaid fee-for-service reimbursements for the first time in 30 years (See story, Page 8). Additionally, the MDA led an effort to secure funding to increase the facility fee paid for dental services

under Medicaid, from about \$200 to \$1,495 for ambulatory surgical centers and \$2,200 for outpatient hospitals. The MDA also advocated for and obtained continued funding of the Healthy Kids Dental Program; for reforms in the Healthy Michigan Plan; and for funding to help administer the MDA's Michigan Donated Dental Services (DDS) Program.

This year, the MDA will work closely with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services as it implements the changes that resulted from the 2022 budget. Additionally, we will seek to increase the Donated Dental Services grant for the first time in more than a decade and ensure that Medicaid Dental programs, including Healthy Kids Dental, continue to receive adequate funding, so that vulnerable populations in Michigan have access to care.

### Increasing the dental workforce

Dentistry, like many other sectors, has been heavily impacted by labor market contractions since 2020. Between an uptick in retirements, health care burnout, and lifestyle changes, dental offices across Michigan are struggling to recruit and retain staff, particularly hygienists and assistants.

The MDA has been meeting with the dental hygiene and dental assisting programs in the state, the Michigan Dental Hygienists' Association, the Michigan Dental Assistants Association, and our members to strengthen the talent pipeline for important dental staff members. We are also exploring options to improve licensure portability so that it is easier to recruit dentists and dental hygienists across state lines. This issue is complex and impacts every sector of the economy, so it will take time and effort to right the ship.

### Student debt relief

Student debt levels are rising at an alarming rate, despite efforts by a

wide range of interests to provide relief to borrowers. Since federal law determines student loan policies, the American Dental Association is the driving force behind advocacy for dental student debt. The ADA has supported legislation to defer interest and payments while students are enrolled in a program or in residency, expand favorable financing options to graduate students, provide federal tax benefits to borrowers who make payments or employers who help their employees make payments, and more. The MDA will continue to support these efforts and monitor opportunities to pursue meaningful student debt relief policies at the state level. ●

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