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WDA Praises DHS Update on Dental Reimbursement Pilot; Deeper Look Will Show Investment is Paying Off

Dr. Thomas Raimann, president of the Wisconsin Dental Association, today released the following statement regarding the Department of Health Services' update on the Dental Reimbursement Pilot Project.

"Secretary-designee Palm's update provides encouraging signs that the Department of Health Services is committed to an accurate evaluation of the Medicaid pilot program. We are deeply grateful that the department has chosen to engage a second, different evaluator to provide a more precise look at the now three years of data available since the pilot project went live in the fall of 2016. We also sincerely appreciate the department's acknowledgment that the first evaluation, while well-intentioned, was limited in its scope and effectiveness. Legislators, and the public, deserve a more comprehensive analysis before making any final decisions on the future of this program.

"We believe that the data will show the state's well-reasoned investment in dental care for its most vulnerable continues to pay off, and we eagerly await the results of the upcoming evaluation. Dentists look forward to continuing our work with the department and the Legislature to ensure that more of our state's residents can access much-needed oral health care."

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About the Dental Reimbursement Pilot Project

The Dental Reimbursement Pilot Project was created in the 2015-2017 state budget, and provides enhanced Medicaid reimbursement for adult emergency and pediatric dental services in Brown, Marathon, Polk, and Racine counties. In February 2019, the UW Population Health Institute released its evaluation of the first year of the program, using data from October 2016 through September 2017.

While the evaluation showed increases both in the number of patients being seen and the number of dentists participating in the Medicaid program, its effectiveness was limited by the parameters set forth in the original law.

The UW Population Health Institute noted in its review, *"We strongly recommend that future evaluations be planned with enough resources to allow a rigorous evaluation design that can determine causality and program effectiveness. This will require that future evaluators have full access to individual-level Medicaid claims data as the basis for analyses."*