

# Oral Health Connections extended pilot project results

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## Findings from providing enhanced reimbursement and frequency of periodontal services for adults with diabetes or who are pregnant

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5693; Section 211(56); Chapter 297; Laws of 2022

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5092; Section 211(50); Chapter 334; Laws of 2021

December 1, 2022

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# Oral Health Connections pilot project results

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## Acknowledgements

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## Executive summary

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Adults with diabetes or who are pregnant are at increased risk for developing periodontal (gum) disease. Treatment often requires more frequent maintenance to control the disease and prevent poor health outcomes, which are more likely among those with diabetes or who are pregnant. To address this need, the Legislature established the Oral Health Connections (OHC) pilot project in the operating and supplemental operating budget bills SSB 5883 (2017) and ESSB 6032 (2018). The Legislature extended the project in the operating and supplemental operating budget bills ESSB 5092 (2021) and ESSB 5693 (2022):

“Within the amounts appropriated in this section, the authority shall extend the oral health connections pilot project in Spokane, Thurston, and Cowlitz counties. The authority shall continue to work in collaboration with a state-based oral health foundation to jointly develop and implement the program. The purpose of the pilot is to test the effect that enhanced dental benefits for medicaid clients with diabetes and pregnant clients have on access to dental care, health outcomes, and medical care costs. The pilot program must continue to include enhanced reimbursement rates for participating dental providers, including denturists licensed under chapter 18.30 RCW, and an increase in the allowable number of periodontal treatments to up to four per calendar year. The authority has the option of extending pilot program eligibility to dually eligible medicaid clients who are diabetic or pregnant and to pregnant medicaid clients under the age of 20. The authority has the option of adjusting the pilot program benefit design and fee schedule based on previous findings, within amounts appropriated in this section. Diabetic or pregnant medicaid clients who are receiving dental care within the pilot regions, regardless of location of the service within the pilot regions, are eligible for the increased number of periodontal treatments. The state-based oral health foundation shall continue to partner with the authority and provide wraparound services to link patients to care. The authority and foundation shall provide a joint report to the appropriate committees of the legislature on October 1, 2021, outlining the findings of the original three-year pilot program, and on December 1, 2022, outlining the progress of the extended pilot program.”

This legislative report outlines the findings of the original OHC pilot project and provides the most current data for the pilot extension. Participation in the OHC pilot project continues to be lower than expected. From January 1, 2019, through December 31, 2021, 17,697 Apple Health (Medicaid) enrollees who were pregnant or diabetic and receiving services in one of the three pilot counties were eligible for the pilot. During the initial three years of the original pilot, only ten OHC dental providers participated, resulting in 423 procedures being delivered to 176 eligible Apple Health clients. 176 clients make up less than one percent of the total available eligible clients in the three counties. Apple Health billed \$21,392.93 for those procedures — about two percent of the \$1 million budget appropriation.

From January 1, 2022, through June 30, 2022, a total of five OHC providers billed for 119 procedures on 70 eligible Apple Health clients, equaling .546 percent of the 12,804 total eligibles. Apple Health billed \$14,450.48 for those procedures.

COVID-19 pandemic restrictions appear to have significantly limited OHC pilot project participation. A dental provider survey and Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA) Dental Program staff

observations identified opportunities to increase participation related to billing challenges and the need for further enhanced reimbursement rates. HCA's initial response included working with dental providers to address challenges with billing for OHC pilot project dental procedures. In addition, Apple Health adult dental procedure reimbursement rates increased by 100 percent beginning on July 1, 2021. This provided HCA and Arcora Foundation, a state-based oral health foundation, an opportunity to notify dental providers of the overall rate increase and increase in OHC rates.

The 2021 operating and 2022 supplemental operating budgets instructed HCA to continue to work with Arcora Foundation (Arcora) to extend the pilot. HCA and Arcora met to review findings from the original three-year pilot before extending the OHC pilot project in January 2022. Both HCA and Arcora agreed to extend the pilot through December 31, 2023, add additional procedures, and expand the age range of eligible clients allowed to participate in the pilot including the addition of dual-eligible clients (people insured by both Medicaid and Medicare). The added age range and additional procedures were based on feedback from providers in the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Research and Data Analysis Division (RDA) evaluation.

## Background

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Periodontal disease, or gum disease, is the result of a bacterial infection that causes inflammation of the tissues and bone that surround and support the teeth. In the early stage of gum disease (gingivitis), the gums become swollen and red, and they may bleed. In its more serious form (periodontitis), the gums can pull away from the tooth, bone can be lost, and the teeth may loosen or even fall out. Periodontal disease is much more common among adults than among children. Periodontal disease and tooth decay are the two biggest threats to dental health.<sup>1</sup>

Diabetes and pregnancy are well-established risk factors for periodontal disease.

- People with diabetes are more vulnerable to periodontal disease than those without diabetes.<sup>2</sup> Periodontal disease may make it more difficult for people who have diabetes to control their blood sugar, which puts people with diabetes at increased risk for diabetic complications.<sup>3</sup>
- Most individuals who are pregnant experience gingivitis during their pregnancy, which can develop into periodontitis. Periodontitis has also been associated with poor pregnancy outcomes, including preterm birth and low birth weight.<sup>4</sup>

Good oral hygiene and regular professional dental cleanings can help to control and treat gingivitis. It is possible to treat more severe forms of periodontal disease successfully, but it can often require more frequent maintenance and more extensive treatment, such as deep cleaning of the tooth root surfaces below the gums.<sup>5</sup> However, adult clients enrolled in Apple Health, including those with diabetes or who are pregnant, have historically been unable to access necessary dental procedures frequently enough to treat and manage periodontal disease effectively. This is based on the prevailing standard of care to provide periodontal maintenance every three to four months to clients with periodontal disease. Apple Health currently covers one periodontal maintenance per twelve months.

## Legislative requirement

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 6032 (2018)<sup>6</sup> appropriated \$1 million for the Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA) to implement the three-year Oral Health Connections (OHC) pilot project in Spokane, Thurston, and Cowlitz counties. The purpose of the OHC pilot project was to test the effect that enhanced dental benefits for adult Apple Health clients with diabetes and pregnant clients have on access to dental care, health outcomes, and medical care costs. The budget proviso directed HCA to:

- Model the OHC pilot project after the Access to Baby and Child Dentistry (ABCD) program. As part of its medical-dental integration model, the ABCD program trains medical providers to provide early oral

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<sup>1</sup> "Periodontal Disease", Centers of Disease Control and Prevention; accessed on July 15, 2021, from the [CDC's website](#).

<sup>2</sup> "Disparities in Preventive Oral Health Care and Periodontal Health Among Adults with Diabetes", Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; accessed on July 15, 2021, from the [CDC's website](#).

<sup>3</sup> "Diabetes and Periodontal Disease", American Academy of Periodontology; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [perio.org](#).

<sup>4</sup> "Pregnancy and Oral Health", Centers of Disease Control and Prevention; accessed on July 15, 2021, from the [CDC's website](#).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 6032, Chapter 299, Laws of 2018, Partial Veto, Section 213(1)(oo); accessed on July 15, 2021, from [lawfiles.leg.wa.gov](#). This amended a similar proviso in the 2017 biennial budget: Substitute Senate Bill (SSB) 5883, Chapter 1, Laws of 2017 (3rd Special Session), Partial Veto, Section 213(1)(nn); accessed on July 15, 2021, from [lawfiles.leg.wa.gov](#).

health intervention, such as fluoride treatments, oral exams, and family oral health education. The medical providers also work to refer their Apple Health patients ages five and younger to dental services and reimburses ABCD-trained dental providers higher rates for those patients' dental services.<sup>7,8</sup>

- Reimburse participating dental providers at higher rates for their services to OHC pilot program clients.
- Partner with the Arcora Foundation<sup>9</sup> (formerly the Washington Dental Service Foundation) to develop and implement the OHC pilot project jointly and provide wraparound services to link patients to care.
- Increase the allowable number of periodontal treatments for qualifying adult Apple Health clients from one per 12-month period to up to four per 12-month period. Clients must receive these services within the OHC pilot project regions (i.e., Spokane, Thurston, or Cowlitz counties).
- Provide, in partnership with Arcora Foundation, a joint progress report to the Legislature on December 1, 2017, and December 1, 2018, about the OHC pilot project's implementation.<sup>10,11</sup>

ESSB 5693 (2022) gave direction to extend the pilot. The following section outlines both the original and extended pilot eligibility.

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<sup>7</sup> Washington Apple Health (Medicaid) Access to Baby and Child Dentistry Billing Guide (for clients through age 5); accessed on July 15, 2021, from [hca.wa.gov](http://hca.wa.gov).

<sup>8</sup> WAC 182-535-1245 Access to baby and child dentistry (ABCD) program; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).

<sup>9</sup> Arcora: The Foundation of Delta Dental of Washington; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [arcorafoundation.org](http://arcorafoundation.org).

<sup>10</sup> "Oral Health Connections Pilot Project: Enhanced Periodontal Services for women experiencing pregnancy and clients with diabetes", December 1, 2017; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).

<sup>11</sup> "Oral health Connections Project: Enhanced Periodontal Services for Women Experiencing Pregnancy and Adult Clients with Diabetes", December 1, 2018; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov). This legislative report referred to the requirement in the 2018 supplemental state operating budget to contract with dental managed care organizations (MCOs) throughout the state to administer the Apple Health dental benefit, effective January 1, 2019. HCA later rescheduled that launch date to July 1, 2019. However, in May 2019, the Legislature removed that requirement in the 2019-21 state operating budget and directed that HCA must provide Apple Health dental services "through fee-for-service and may not proceed with either a carved-out or a carved-in managed care dental option." See Engrossed Substitute House Bill (ESHB) 1109, Chapter 415, Laws of 2019, Partial Veto, Section 211(52); accessed on July 15, 2021, from [lawfiles.leg.wa.gov](http://lawfiles.leg.wa.gov).

## Implementation efforts

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To implement the OHC pilot project successfully, HCA:

- Received approval from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) on November 19, 2018, to implement the OHC pilot project.
- Established the OHC pilot project rules in WAC 182-535-1270.<sup>12</sup>
- Made changes to the Apple Health claims system (ProviderOne) and developed both the OHC pilot project billing guide<sup>13</sup> and processes to reimburse dental providers participating in the OHC pilot project at higher rates for their qualifying services. Appendix A contains tables listing the reimbursement amounts for qualifying dental procedures.
- Instituted a no-cost contract with Arcora Foundation for deliverables related to the OHC pilot project.

OHC pilot project rules define which Apple Health clients are eligible or ineligible for participation, and what dental providers must do to qualify to participate in the OHC pilot project. The following information reflects the original pilot eligibility.

### Original pilot eligibility

- **Eligible Apple Health clients must be:**
  - Age 21 to 64.
  - Pregnant (which includes the 60-day postpartum period from the date of delivery) or diabetic (Type I or II), or both.
  - Receiving OHC pilot project services in Cowlitz, Spokane, or Thurston Counties; and
  - Referred by a nondental primary health care provider, managed care organization, or a designated community organization to a qualified oral health connections pilot project dental provider.<sup>14</sup>
  - Or provide a self-attestation of diabetes and/or pregnancy diagnosis.
- **Apple Health clients are ineligible if they are enrolled in:**
  - Family Planning Only programs under chapter 182-532 WAC;<sup>15</sup>
  - Medical Care Services program under WAC 182-508-0005;<sup>16</sup> or
  - Both Medicaid and Medicare.<sup>17</sup>
- **Apple Health-contracted dental providers may participate in the OHC pilot project if they both:**
  - Provide services in Cowlitz, Spokane, or Thurston counties; and
  - Complete the OHC pilot project training to become certified.

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<sup>12</sup> WAC 182-535-1270 Oral health connections pilot project; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).

<sup>13</sup> "Oral health Connections (OHC) Pilot Project Billing Guide (For services provided in Cowlitz, Spokane, and Thurston counties only)"; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [hca.wa.gov](http://hca.wa.gov).

<sup>14</sup> WAC 182-535-1270 Oral health connections pilot project; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).

<sup>15</sup> Chapter 182-532 WAC Reproductive Health/Family Planning Only Programs; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).

<sup>16</sup> WAC 182-508-0005 Eligibility for Washington apple health medical care services eligibility and scope of coverage; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).

<sup>17</sup> WAC 182-535-1270 Oral health connections pilot project; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).



## Extended pilot eligibility

- **Eligible Apple Health clients must be:**
  - Pregnant clients aged 16 and older (which includes the 12-month After-Pregnancy Coverage program); WAC 182-505-0115<sup>18</sup>
  - Diabetic clients aged 21 and older
  - Receiving OHC pilot project services in Cowlitz, Spokane, or Thurston Counties; and
  - Referred by a non-dental primary health care provider, managed care organization, or a designated community organization to a qualified oral health connections pilot project dental provider.<sup>19</sup>
  - Or provide a self-attestation of diabetes and/or pregnancy diagnosis.
- **Apple Health clients are ineligible if they are enrolled in:**
  - Family Planning Only programs under chapter 182-532 WAC;<sup>20</sup>
  - Medical Care Services program under WAC 182-508-0005;<sup>21</sup> or
- **Apple Health-contracted dental providers may participate in the OHC pilot project if they both:**
  - Provide services in Cowlitz, Spokane, or Thurston counties; and
  - Complete the OHC pilot project training to become certified.

Arcora Foundation contracted with the following entities to facilitate OHC pilot project implementation:

- The University of Washington School of Dentistry,<sup>22</sup> which assisted Arcora Foundation in the development of the OHC pilot project training curriculum and certification process for dental providers.
- Aging and Long-Term Care of Eastern Washington,<sup>23</sup> the Spokane Regional Health District,<sup>24</sup> CHOICE Regional Health Network,<sup>25</sup> and Youth and Family Link<sup>26</sup> to provide care coordination services and to help Apple Health clients make and keep dental appointments.
- The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Research and Data Analysis Division (RDA)<sup>27</sup> to develop and implement an evaluation of the OHC pilot project, including both quantitative and qualitative data analyses through the life of the original pilot, January 1, 2019, to December 31, 2021.

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<sup>18</sup> WAC 182-505-0115 After Pregnancy Care; accessed on August 22, 2022, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).

<sup>19</sup> WAC 182-535-1270 Oral health connections pilot project; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).

<sup>20</sup> Chapter 182-532 WAC Reproductive Health/Family Planning Only Programs; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).

<sup>21</sup> WAC 182-508-0005 Eligibility for Washington apple health medical care services eligibility and scope of coverage; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [app.leg.wa.gov](http://app.leg.wa.gov).

<sup>22</sup> University of Washington school of dentistry; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [uwoepd@uw.edu](mailto:uwoepd@uw.edu).

<sup>23</sup> Aging and Long-Term Care of Eastern Washington; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [altcrew.org](http://altcrew.org).

<sup>24</sup> Spokane Regional Health District; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [srhd.org](http://srhd.org).

<sup>25</sup> CHOICE Regional Health Network; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [crhn.org](http://crhn.org).

<sup>26</sup> Youth and Family Link; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [linkprogram.org](http://linkprogram.org).

<sup>27</sup> Research and Data Analysis Division, Facilities, Finance and Analytics Administration, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [dshs.wa.gov](http://dshs.wa.gov).

In preparation for the OHC pilot project's launch, numerous outreach and training efforts occurred in Cowlitz, Spokane, and Thurston Counties (pilot counties) between May 2018 and December 2018. For example:

- Arcora Foundation and local community partners engaged local dentists in the pilot counties through personal visits, stakeholder groups, and feedback sessions to help inform the OHC pilot project design and recruit providers for OHC pilot project participation.
- HCA, Arcora Foundation, and the University of Washington School of Dentistry conducted in-person trainings at local dental societies in pilot counties to certify dental providers for OHC pilot project participation.
- Arcora Foundation, in collaboration with the University of Washington School of Dentistry, delivered OHC pilot project training to medical providers practicing in OHC pilot counties. This helped the medical providers to recognize the connection between oral health and systemic health, address oral health in their medical setting, and refer eligible OHC patients to dental care. Medical providers refer clients by contacting local OHC partners or using Arcora Foundation's online or telephone-based DentistLink referral tool.<sup>28</sup>
- Arcora Foundation also provided outreach and education to Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), Rural Health Clinics (RHCs) and Tribes/Urban Indian Health Programs within the pilot counties to promote participation in the OHC pilot project. The educational efforts emphasized that FQHCs and RHCs can receive reimbursement for three additional encounters for periodontal treatments by participating in the OHC pilot project.

Outreach and training efforts have been ongoing throughout the duration of the OHC pilot project, which launched on January 1, 2019.

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<sup>28</sup> DentistLink; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [dentistlink.org](https://dentistlink.org).

## Key findings

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Although the OHC pilot project extension report is due December 31, 2022, related dental service utilization data is currently only available for this legislative report through June 30, 2022. Since its launch, OHC pilot project participation volumes have been too small to evaluate the impact its enhanced dental benefits have had on health outcomes or medical care costs. Instead, HCA's evaluation focuses on OHC pilot project's utilization as a proxy for access to dental care. Below is information about dental provider participation and dental service utilization.

### Dental provider participation

Dental provider participation has been lower than HCA expected. From the time the original OHC pilot project concluded (December 31, 2021) HCA has reimbursed ten dental providers for OHC pilot project services. These providers include eight in Spokane County and two in Thurston County. There were none in Cowlitz County.<sup>29</sup> Spokane County's population is greater than the populations of Cowlitz and Thurston Counties combined, which helps to explain some of the uneven distribution of participating OHC pilot project providers.<sup>30</sup> It is also noteworthy to mention that Spokane county has a dental hygiene program at Eastern Washington University which has had high participation in the pilot.

The first six months of the pilot extension saw four providers from Spokane (none of them new), zero from Thurston County and one from Cowlitz County. The single new provider in Cowlitz County is representative of extensive outreach, including one-on-one, in-person billing training by HCA and Arcora.

### Provider survey

At Arcora Foundation's direction and in consultation with HCA, RDA surveyed dental providers in the pilot counties between July 2020 and September 2020 to learn more about OHC pilot program participation and identify opportunities for improvement. [Appendix B](#) contains RDA's report on the survey results. Respondents who were successfully participating in the OHC pilot project indicated that they were pleased with the pilot and reported that their patients were grateful to receive the additional dental services. However, other dental providers reported that they:

- Were unaware of or insufficiently familiar with the OHC pilot program, including some providers who had previously received the necessary training to become certified and participate in the OHC pilot program.
- Would like assistance to enroll in the OHC pilot program and to bill for the pilot's services, citing difficulties with identifying eligible patients and navigating a billing process they described as confusing and complicated, compared to billing Apple Health generally.

Of the 67 dental providers who responded to the question "What would encourage you to participate (or continue participation) in the Oral Health Connections pilot [project]?", 52 providers (about 78 percent) indicated that higher Medicaid billing rates than Medicaid alone would encourage their participation.

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<sup>29</sup> HCA Financial Services Division pulled data from the ProviderOne Operational Data Store on July 13, 2021, to calculate the OHC pilot project provider totals.

<sup>30</sup> The Washington State Office of Financial Management estimates that, as of April 1, 2021: Spokane County's population is 527,600; Cowlitz County's population is 111,800; and Thurston County's population is 295,300. See "April 1, 2021 Population of Cities, Towns and Counties Used for Allocation of Selected State Revenues: State of Washington"; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [ofm.wa.gov](https://ofm.wa.gov).

Table A4 in Appendix A lists the median amounts that Washington State dental providers typically bill for the procedures, for which the OHC pilot project reimburses at enhanced rates. These billed amounts are notably higher than the OHC pilot project enhanced rates but are still on average 45–50 percent lower than what is typically billed for these procedures.

### **Additional provider feedback**

Multiple FQHCs, RHCs, and Tribal/Urban Indian Health Clinics have shared anecdotally with HCA’s Dental Program staff that the OHC pilot project’s higher reimbursement rates were insufficient to incentivize their participation. Although these providers would have been able to receive more encounters for periodontal maintenance, that revenue would not have been sufficient to offset the additional administrative burden associated with identifying eligible patients and billing for the OHC pilot project. In addition, some providers have reported challenges associated with the requirement to include expedited prior authorization numbers in the billing documentation.

In response to the feedback RDA received in the survey and the communication HCA Dental Program staff and Arcora received from various providers, HCA and Arcora produced additional training materials and provided technical assistance directly to relevant providers.

### **Dental service utilization**

For the entirety of the original pilot, January 1, 2019, through December 31, 2021, a total of 176 unique Apple Health clients received 423 dental procedures through the OHC pilot program. Apple Health expenditures for the OHC pilot program dental procedures from January 1, 2019, through December 31, 2021, totaled \$21,392.93, or about two percent of the \$1 million budget appropriation.<sup>31</sup>

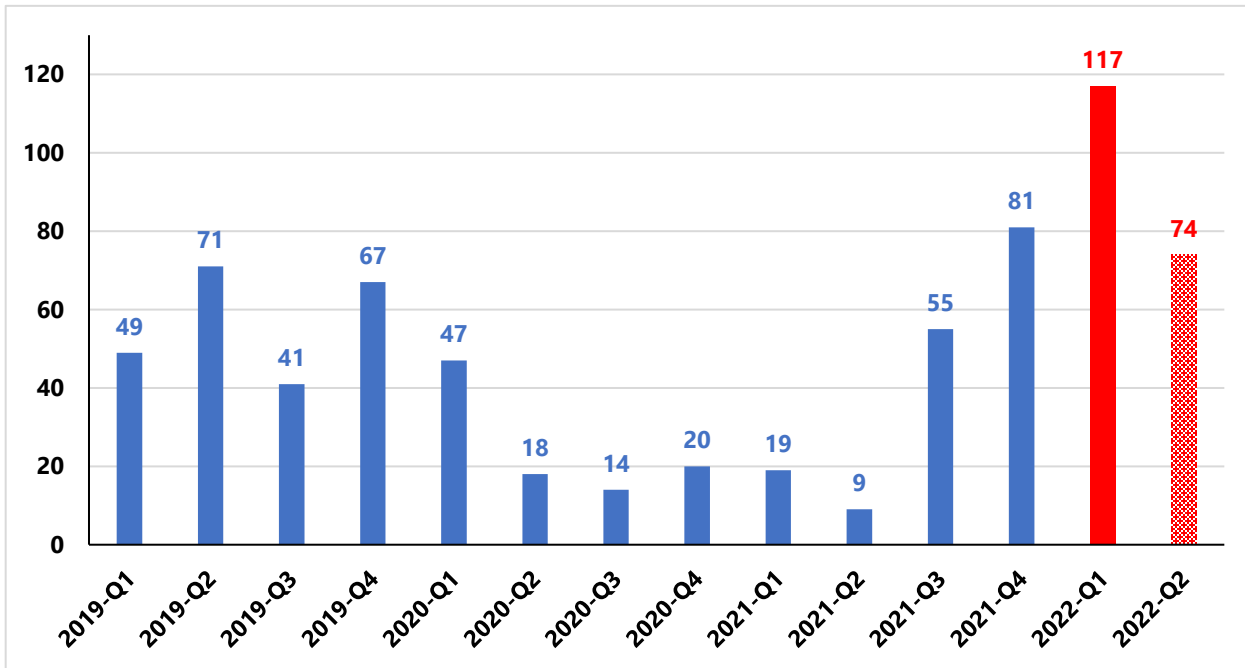
The six-month period of the expansion, covering Quarters One and Two, January 1, 2022, to June 30, 2022, show 70 unique Apple Health clients received 117 dental procedures for a total reimbursement of \$14,450.25.

Figure 1 below shows that the number of dental procedures Apple Health clients received through the OHC pilot project varied considerably over time.

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<sup>31</sup> HCA Financial Services Division pulled data from the ProviderOne Operational Data Store on August 8, 2022, to calculate these totals.

**Figure 1: Number of Oral Health Connections (OHC) pilot project dental procedures by calendar quarter, January 2019 through June 2022**



Source: HCA Financial Services Division queried the ProviderOne Operational Data Store in August 2022

Notes: coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) restrictions began in March 2020; dental procedure counts for 2022-Q2 are incomplete, due to claims lag

However, the count of dental procedures suddenly decreased to 18 during 2020-Q2 and then to 14 procedures during 2020-Q3. These decreases coincided with restrictions related to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak in Washington State, which began in March 2020. For example, on:

- March 19, 2020, the Governor issued Proclamation 20-24 “Restrictions on Non-Urgent Medical Procedures”, which closed dental offices for all procedures except emergency services from through May 18, 2020.<sup>32</sup>
- March 23, 2020, the Governor issued Proclamation 20-25 “Stay Home—Stay Healthy”, which prohibited “all people in Washington State from leaving their homes or participating in social, spiritual and recreational gatherings of any kind regardless of the number of participants, and all non-essential businesses in Washington State from conducting business, within the limitations provided herein.”<sup>33</sup>

COVID-19 restrictions have generally lessened in Washington State since the end of March 2021 with a few setbacks as new variants took hold. Quarters 2020 two through four and quarters 2021 one and two

<sup>32</sup> “Proclamation by the Governor Amending Proclamation 20-05: 20-24 Restrictions on Non Urgent Medical Procedures”; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [governor.wa.gov](http://governor.wa.gov).

<sup>33</sup> “Proclamation by the Governor Amending Proclamation 20-05: 20-25 Stay Home—Stay Healthy”; accessed on July 15, 2021, from [governor.wa.gov](http://governor.wa.gov).

are reflective of the dental office shut down and slow recovery due to office capacity limitations including staff shortages and the client's fear of returning to the office.

The OHC pilot project's recovery was notably lower than what RDA observed for comparable Apple Health dental procedures in the pilot counties during 2021-Q1, which realized about 85 percent recovery from 2019-Q1 and about 100 percent recovery from 2020-Q1. Extrapolating from RDA's survey results, it is possible that due to billing difficulties, dental providers have been prioritizing OHC pilot project procedures lower as they try to recuperate revenue losses that they likely experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, more study would be necessary to evaluate this or other possible explanations for the OHC pilot project's recovery through 2021-Q2.

The number of OHC pilot project procedures began to increase in 2021 Q3 which directly coincides with the 100 percent increase in adult dental rate reimbursement that went in to effect July 1, 2021. There is a notable jump in OHC procedures performed in 2022-Q1 which corresponds with the additional messaging delivered to providers regarding the pilot extension. It is noteworthy to call out that even though there has been an increase in procedures performed in the last two quarters there has only been one additional OHC provider delivering services.

## Conclusion

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Adults with diabetes or who are pregnant are at increased risk for developing periodontal disease. Treatment often requires more frequent maintenance to control the advancement of periodontal disease. Untreated periodontal disease is known to contribute to poor health outcomes particularly for those with underlying health conditions like diabetes and pregnancy.

The Legislature required HCA to establish the OHC pilot project to address this need. HCA launched the project on January 1, 2019. To implement the pilot, HCA established rules for the pilot project's client and provider eligibility, developed billing processes, and collaborated with Arcora Foundation, the University of Washington School of Dentistry, RDA, and other statewide and local entities.

Originally set to conclude December 31, 2021, the 2021 Legislature authorized HCA and Arcora Foundation to extend the pilot for a length of time to be determined by the two organizations. HCA and Arcora Foundation considered the findings from the original three-year pilot and even though the rate of participation was low, agreed to extend the OHC pilot project for an additional two years in the hope of making up for time lost due to COVID-19. In response to provider feedback, the pilot extension includes a re-vamped benefit design with added procedures and a broader range of eligible client ages. In addition, Apple Health adult dental procedure reimbursement rates increased by 100 percent on July 1, 2021. [Table A2 and A3 in Appendix A](#) contains the increased rates.

On a small scale, the OHC pilot project has delivered greater access to periodontal dental care for Apple Health clients. It has also allowed providers to practice the standard of care for treating the periodontal health of diabetic and pregnant clients.

## Appendix A: Oral Health Connections pilot project dental procedure reimbursement amounts

Table A1 below lists the OHC pilot project dental procedures for which Apple Health reimburses dental providers at higher rates than the regular, non-OHC pilot project Apple Health dental benefit. The table includes the reimbursement amounts from when the OHC pilot project launched on January 1, 2019, through June 30, 2021.

**Table A1: Apple Health maximum allowable Oral Health Connections (OHC) pilot project and non-OHC pilot project reimbursement amounts for covered adult dental procedures, January 1, 2019, through June 30, 2021**

Dental procedure name and code	OHC pilot project maximum allowable reimbursement	Non-OHC pilot project maximum allowable reimbursement
Comprehensive Oral Evaluation — new or established patient (D0150)	\$39.00	\$24.84
Intraoral — complete series (including bitewings) (D0210)	\$50.55	\$32.20
Bitewings four radiographic images (D0274)	\$12.98	\$8.28
Periodontal scaling and root planing (4+ teeth/quadrant) (D4341)	\$37.97	\$24.18
Periodontal scaling and root planing (1–3 teeth/quadrant) (D4342)	\$19.73	\$12.57
Periodontal maintenance (D4910)	\$72.20	\$46.00

Source: Apple Health dental program fee schedule (January 1, 2019); accessed on July 14, 2021, from [hca.wa.gov](http://hca.wa.gov).

Notes: "code" refers to Current Dental Terminology (CDT) procedure code; "adults" are age 21 and older

Table A2 below contains the reimbursement amounts for these procedures, which increased on July 1, 2021, by about 100 percent from the amounts in place from January 1, 2019, through June 30, 2021.



**Table A2: Apple Health maximum allowable Oral Health Connections (OHC) pilot project and non-OHC pilot project reimbursement amounts for covered adult dental procedures, as of July 1, 2021**

Dental procedure name and code	OHC pilot project maximum allowable reimbursement	Non-OHC pilot project maximum allowable reimbursement
Comprehensive Oral Evaluation — new or established patient (D0150)	\$77.00	\$49.68
Intraoral — complete series (including bitewings) (D0210)	\$99.82	\$64.40
Bitewings four radiographic images (D0274)	\$25.67	\$16.56
Periodontal scaling and root planing (4+ teeth/quadrant) (D4341)	\$74.96	\$48.36
Periodontal scaling and root planing (1–3 teeth/quadrant) (D4342)	\$38.95	\$25.13
Periodontal maintenance (D4910)	\$142.60	\$92.00

Source: Apple Health dental program fee schedule (July 1, 2021); accessed on July 14, 2021, from [hca.wa.gov](https://hca.wa.gov).

Notes: “code” refers to Current Dental Terminology (CDT) procedure code; “adults” are age 21 and older

**Table A3: Additional Apple Health maximum allowable Oral Health Connections (OHC) extended pilot project and non-OHC pilot project reimbursement amounts for covered adult dental procedures, as of January 1, 2022**

Dental procedure name and code	OHC pilot project maximum allowable reimbursement	Non-OHC pilot project maximum allowable reimbursement
Periodic Oral Evaluation (D0120)	\$62.74	\$40.48
Adult Prophy (D1110)	\$106.58	\$68.76
Fluoride Varnish (D1206)	\$38.19	\$24.64
Silver Diamine Fluoride (D1354)	\$9.30	\$6.00

Table A4 lists amounts that approximate what Washington State dental providers typically bill for these procedures. These amounts are notably higher than what Apple Health currently reimburses, per table A2.

**Table A4: Median billed amounts in Washington State for dental procedures for which Oral Health Connections (OHC) pilot project pays enhanced rates**

Dental procedure name and code	Median billed amounts
<b>Periodic Oral Evaluation</b>	\$64.00
Comprehensive Oral Evaluation — new or established patient (D0150)	\$106.67
<b>Intraoral — complete series (including bitewings) (D0210)</b>	\$157.67
Bitewings four radiographic images (D0274)	\$77.33
<b>Adult Prophylaxis (D1110)</b>	\$111.67
<b>Fluoride Varnish (D1206)</b>	\$48.00
Silver Diamine Fluoride	\$77.33
Periodontal scaling and root planing (4+ teeth/quadrant) (D4341)	\$304.67
<b>Periodontal scaling and root planing (1–3 teeth/quadrant) (D4342)</b>	\$225.67
Periodontal maintenance (D4910)	\$162.67

Source: HCA Financial Services Division pulled National Dental Advisory Service (NDAS) data from 2021 NDAS software

Notes: “code” refers to Current Dental Terminology (CDT) procedure code; “median billed amounts” means the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of what dental providers in the following three Washington State ZIP codes bill for these dental procedures: 98004 (Bellevue), 98504 (Olympia), and 99201 (Spokane)

## Appendix B: Dental provider survey results

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Appendix B contains eight pages of dental provider survey results.

To access this appendix, [please view it on our website](#).

If you have difficulty viewing this appendix, contact HCA and an electronic copy will be provided.