

# Policy on Third-party Reimbursement for Oral Health Care Services Related to Congenital Orofacial Anomalies

Originating Committee  
Clinical Affairs Committee

Review Council  
Council on Clinical Affairs

Adopted  
1996

Revised  
2000, 2003

## Purpose

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), recognizing that patients with craniofacial anomalies require oral health care as a direct result of the medical condition and that these services are an integral part of the rehabilitative process, advocates reimbursement for provision of comprehensive oral health care services throughout life.<sup>1</sup>

## Methods

This policy is based on review of current dental and medical literature, as well as policies and guidelines established by stakeholders in the health of infants, children, and adolescents affected by craniofacial anomalies. Data is not available to determine the effectiveness of various insurance coverage or limitations of that coverage on children with craniofacial anomalies.

## Background

Congenital orofacial anomalies that result in malformed or missing teeth, such as ectodermal dysplasia and cleft defects, can have significant negative functional, esthetic, and psychological effects on individuals and their families. Young children benefit from esthetic and functional restorative techniques and readily adapt to appliances that replace missing teeth and improve function, appearance, and self-image. During the period of facial and oral growth, appliances require frequent adjustment and have to be remade as the individual grows.

These patients often are denied coverage for initial appliance construction and, more frequently, replacement of appliances as the child grows. Third-party payors legally may control the coverage of these services by limiting contractual benefits. The distinction between congenital anomalies involving the orofacial complex and those involving other parts of the body is often arbitrary and unfair. For instance, health care policies may provide reimbursement for the necessary prosthesis required for congenitally missing extremities and its replacement as the individual grows, but deny benefits for the initial prosthesis and the necessary periodic replacement for congenitally missing teeth. Third-party payors frequently will refuse to pay for oral health care services even when they clearly are associated with the complete habilitation of the craniofacial condition.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, clerical personnel and professional consultants employed by third-party payors often make benefit determinations based on arbitrary distinction between medical vs dental anomalies, ignoring important functional and medical relationships. Evaluation and care provided for an infant, child, or adolescent by a cleft lip/palate, orofacial, or craniofacial deformities team have been described as the optimal way to coordinate and deliver complex services.<sup>2</sup> This approach may provide additional documentation to facilitate "medical necessity" of dental rehabilitation.

## Policy statement

The AAPD strongly believes that only the dentist providing the oral health care for the patient can determine the medical indication and justification for treatment in these cases.

The AAPD encourages the insurance industry to:

1. recognize that malformed and missing teeth and resultant anomalies of facial development seen in orofacial anomalies are congenital defects, just as the congenital absence of other body parts;
2. include oral health care services, such as initial appliance construction, periodic examinations, and replacement of appliances, related to these facial and dental anomalies as benefits of health insurance without discrimination between the medical and dental nature of the congenital defect;
3. end arbitrary and unfair refusal of reimbursement for oral health care services related to these facial and dental anomalies;
4. regularly consult the AAPD with respect to the development of benefit plans that best serve the oral health interests of infants, children, and adolescents with craniofacial anomalies.

## References

1. American Cleft Palate-Craniofacial Association. Parameters for evaluation and treatment of patients with cleft lip/palate or other craniofacial anomalies. Revised ed. Chapel Hill, NC: American Cleft Palate-Craniofacial Association; April 2000.
2. Strauss RP. Organization and delivery of craniofacial services. *Cleft Palate Craniofac J* 1999;36:189-195.

Copyright of Pediatric Dentistry is the property of American Society of Dentistry for Children and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.