



February 15, 2021

Dear Members of the Health Finance and Policy Committee:

On behalf of NAMI Minnesota, I am writing to support HF 838, which would expand Medical Assistance to cover nonsurgical treatment for periodontal disease. The need for this treatment is great among people with serious mental illnesses.

The connection between mental illnesses and poor dental health is due to a number of factors. The symptoms of mental illnesses can result in someone not paying attention to hygiene, including brushing one's teeth and flossing. Symptoms can also lead to not scheduling regular check-ups with the dentist, including teeth cleaning. Medications can cause dry mouth which is a major risk factor for gingivitis. People with more serious mental illnesses are more likely to have poor nutrition, smoke, and consume sugary drinks. We also know that high stress increases cortisol in the body which weakens the immune system and makes people more vulnerable to developing gum disease. Eating disorders also can have a very negative impact on oral health due to erosion. People with anxiety have a greater tendency to grind their teeth.

In talking with inpatient psychiatric units, it is not uncommon for patients to also be experiencing tooth decay and pain. Extraction is often the only option. As people lose their teeth, it impacts their nutrition and frankly, self-esteem. According to one study, people with serious mental illnesses are 2.7 times more likely to lose all their teeth than the regular population.

While we typically focus on access to mental health treatment, we are concerned with the whole person. Healthy teeth are important to overall health. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Abderholden".

Sue Abderholden, MPH  
Executive Director



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