

Evidence-Based Dentistry

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program Oral health meets overall health.

What is evidence-based dentistry?

Evidence-based dentistry links oral health and overall health. It is based on clinically relevant scientific evidence that demonstrates how individuals with specific health conditions can benefit from additional oral health care.

If a group wants to implement Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program and/or other dental plan changes, what do they do?

Delta Dental of Illinois added the Enhanced Benefits Program to all its fully insured groups' dental benefit plans, with few exceptions in September 2007. Delta Dental of Illinois added several new conditions July 1, 2009. (Please note: this program only applies to Delta Dental PPOSM and Delta Dental Premier[®].) Current self-funded groups have the option of adding these benefits. Including these enhancements will result in less than a one percent increase in dental benefit plan costs for self-insured groups. All new, fully insured and self-funded quotes will include these enhanced benefits. Groups may want to consider additional changes in plan design at the time of renewal to enhance cost savings and/or respond to changes in consumer preferences and new technology. As appropriate, Delta Dental of Illinois will provide information about these options and make it easy for groups to make changes.

What is the effective date of Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program?

Our original Enhanced Benefits Program was effective September 1, 2007, and included periodontal disease, diabetes and pregnancy. We have enhanced the program to include high-risk cardiac conditions, kidney failure/undergoing dialysis, suppressed immune systems and cancer-related chemotherapy and/or radiation; these enhancements are effective July 1, 2009. For new groups, the effective date will be the effective date of the dental plan.

How can a group communicate changes to their employees?

Groups can use whatever mechanisms they routinely use to

communicate benefit information. As with other aspects of a group's dental benefits plan, Delta Dental of Illinois has a host of materials to help provide support for the group's efforts in communicating changes to their employees. Those materials include a highlight sheet detailing how to enroll, check stuffers, newsletter articles, flyers for benefit fairs, email templates and posters.

Will there be other evidence-based plan design recommendations in the future?

Probably. Scientific understanding of the issues continues to grow. We will not rush to add options that are not solidly grounded in science, but we will monitor research and discussion within the dental science community and develop plan options that reflect consensus among those experts.

Specific Questions about Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program

What makes it special?

Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program integrates medical and dental care – oral health meets overall health. The plan customizes benefits at the individual level, offering additional services to individuals who have specific health conditions that can be positively affected by additional care.

Can a group offer just one part of Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program (for example, provide additional services for people with diabetes, but not for other medical conditions)?

No, the plan is available as a package. It is available for Delta Dental PPO and Delta Dental Premier plans only.

How does an enrollee know if his/her group offers Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program? How do they enroll?

Initial enrollment information will explain this to enrollees. Also, Delta Dental has created an easy-to-use Web interface that will allow individuals and their dentists

to check for Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program coverage and to quickly and easily enroll for the additional benefits if their group offers the plan option.

How does Delta Dental of Illinois know the individual actually has the condition he/she indicates?

There is no incentive for an individual to falsify information using the self-enrollment feature of Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program. The slight risk of an individual falsifying a health condition to gain additional Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program coverage is far outweighed by the advantages it offers over other mechanisms, such as passive enrollment based on medical claims.

To further ensure the integrity of the program, Delta Dental will randomly audit Delta Dental of Illinois' Enhanced Benefits Program health history information provided by enrollees with health history information on file with their attending dentist.

Will Delta Dental of Illinois be able to report the number of enrollees who register with specific health conditions?

Yes, within the privacy requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Is it harmful to expose some at-risk patients to additional dental treatments?

It is important to note that the timing of treatment is critically important for at-risk individuals. As a result, their decision to receive treatment must be made in conjunction with their physician and dentist.

What coverage will be provided?

Our Enhanced Benefits Program includes additional cleanings and/or applications of topical fluoride. The program addresses the unique health challenges faced by people with conditions that put them at risk for oral health disease, and can also play an important role in the management of an individual's medical condition.

The costs of the additional cleanings and fluoride treatments will be applied to the annual maximum. The timing of treatment is very important when serious medical conditions exist. People that have one of these conditions should talk with their dentist and physician about if and when treatment is right for them.

What's the health benefit?

For people with a susceptibility to periodontal diseases, periodontal maintenance needs to be conducted at more frequent intervals to help prevent tooth loss, a complication of these diseases.

For diabetics, research has confirmed that diabetes worsens with periodontal diseases, and it strongly suggests that severe periodontal disease increases the severity of diabetes. Glycemic control has proven to be one of the best ways to prevent complications of diabetes. A number of studies strongly indicate that when people with diabetes receive more professional teeth cleanings, their blood glucose levels are much better controlled.

Clinical studies of pregnant women with periodontal disease strongly suggest that more frequent professional teeth cleanings will benefit the health of both the baby and the mother.

For people with high-risk cardiac conditions, a recent guideline by the American Heart Association indicates that an individual's overall oral health may be an important factor in avoiding infective endocarditis. Infective endocarditis occurs when bacteria, often from the mouth, enters the bloodstream and attacks the lining of the heart. At-risk individuals can reduce bacteria levels in the mouth with more frequent cleanings in an effort to lower their risk for infective endocarditis.

For people with kidney failure, or who are undergoing chemotherapy and/or radiation or who have suppressed immune systems, it is well established scientifically that people with serious health conditions like these are at increased risk for infection, generally because their immune system response has been weakened. These people can benefit from having their teeth cleaned professionally at more frequent intervals to reduce the build-up of bacteria in the mouth. This may help lower the risk that this bacteria will enter the bloodstream, create infection and further compromise their health.

Head and neck radiation causes some specific additional oral health problems. According to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR), prevention of problems in the mouth is critical to obtaining the maximum benefit from cancer treatment, and people are encouraged to see a dentist before beginning cancer treatment. Because a common side effect of head and neck radiation is an increase in cavities, the NIDCR recommends fluoride treatment and the use of prescription-strength fluoride toothpaste by those undergoing this treatment. Enrollees who are receiving this type of radiation should ask their dentist if they would benefit from prescription strength fluoride toothpaste. This product is often covered by medical/prescription drug benefit plans.