

Connecting Apple Health clients to dental services with the DentistLink tool

Progress report

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5092; Section 211(59); Chapter 334; Laws of 2021

June 30, 2022

Connecting Apple Health clients to dental services with the DentistLink tool

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Executive summary

Washington Apple Health (Medicaid) clients can experience numerous barriers to accessing oral health care. Too few dental providers are enrolled in Apple Health, and only a part of those Apple Health-enrolled providers accept new patients. Clients lack a reliable referral tool that they can use to easily find a provider that accepts Apple Health.

In 2020, the Legislature passed Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill (ESSB) 6168 (C 357 L 20); section 211 (61), directing the HCA to develop a public-private partnership with a state-based oral health foundation to connect Apple Health patients to dental services and reduce barriers to accessing care. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor directed agencies to implement a freeze on signing new or amended personal services contracts¹. In 2021, the Governor rescinded the directive², and the Legislature passed [Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill \(ESSB\) 5092 \(C 334 L 21\); section 211\(59\)](#):

\$250,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2022 and \$250,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2023 are provided solely for the authority to continue a public-private partnership with a state-based oral health foundation to connect medicaid patients to dental services and reduce barriers to accessing care. The authority shall submit a progress report to the appropriate committees of the legislature by June 30, 2022.

On December 7, 2021, HCA executed its contract with [Arcora Foundation](#) to utilize the [DentistLink](#) tool in order to provide connect clients to dental health referral services and reduce barriers to service for Apple Health clients, as directed by ESSB 5092. DentistLink utilization has been tracked since July 1, 2021, and HCA has received its first semi-annual report from Arcora Foundation, with promising initial findings.

Report highlights

Based on the Arcora report, the DentistLink has enabled Apple Health clients to:

- Search the [online dental provider directory](#).
- Call or text DentistLink Referral Specialists.
- Receive referrals to DentistLink from a community partner or medical systems via electronic health records.

The report also shows an increase in provider participation and client utilization. The number of oral health provider office locations active in DentistLink increased between by 5.4 percent, from 631 to 665 locations³. DentistLink was accessed 25,380 times during the reporting period, with 94.5 of individuals indicating that they were enrolled in Apple Health.

¹ Schumacher, D. (2020, May 13). Instructions to implement personal services contracts and equipment purchases freeze. State of Washington Office of Financial Management. Retrieved March 30, 2022, from <https://ofm.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/legacy/agencycommunications/FY2020/OFM-Instructions-to-Implement-Personal-Services-Contracts-and-Equipment-Purchases-Freeze.pdf>

² Inslee, J. (2021, April 28). Directive of the Governor. State of Washington Office of Governor Jay Inslee. Retrieved March 31, 2022, from https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/directive/dir_20-05.2.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery

³ The DentistLink database tracks provider locations as brick-and-mortar offices; many provider locations house more than one individual provider.

Background

Prior to DentistLink, the Apple Health dental program relied on two referral tools for clients to search for and connect with dental providers.

1. InsureKidsNow (IKN) dentist locator is designed to help Apple Health clients find dental providers for clients aged 0 to 20 years.
2. Find-a-Provider is a program that HCA developed to help all Apple Health clients find a provider for any medical assistance, including dental needs.

The IKN dentist locator tool arose from a requirement of section 501f of the 2009 Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) Reauthorization Act (CHIPRA)⁴. It was part of a package of dental-related changes that Congress introduced as a part of CHIPRA. The requirement is that every quarter, each state must submit a list of enrolled dentists who are currently providing services to children. Every year, each state must also update a “summary of benefits” detailing what dental services are offered to Apple Health- and CHIP-enrolled children.

The data is made publicly accessible to families through the “[Find a Dentist](#)” page of the [Insure Kids Now website](#). Families can search by benefit plan (for example, in states with multiple dental managed care plans with different networks), geographic location, and specialty.

HCA developed its own referral tool called Find-A-Provider. For several years, the agency has relied on this tool to allow clients to find medical and dental providers within their area. However, Find-A-Provider would be modified to comply with a federal mandate. In 2020, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released the Interoperability and Patient Access⁵ final rule. It requires provider directory information to be made available to Apple Health clients. The interoperability rules are mandated and were put in place to benefit Apple Health clients and create better healthcare access. To help our clients and remain in compliance with the new interoperability requirements, HCA created a new Provider Directory tool made available to Apple Health clients on December 10, 2021. However, this does not include dental services at this time.

These two referral tools may be sufficient. However, one was designed for a specific population (children under 21), and the changes in Find-A-Provider make no significant improvement in helping Apple Health clients find a dental provider. DentistLink is a new comprehensive referral tool that all clients can use to find a dental provider. Arcora Foundation has owned and operated DentistLink since its inception in 2017. DentistLink is a referral service focused on connecting Apple Health and those who do not have insurance or are underinsured with a nearby dentist. Arcora Foundation works throughout the State of Washington to improve the oral health of all people and advance toward health equity. People searching for a dental provider can call or text DentistLink or search the online directory to receive information about nearby providers that meet their needs. Online or over the phone, DentistLink asks a

⁴ Congress. (2009, February 4). Children’s Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2009. Congress.Gov. Retrieved March 3, 2022, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-111publ3/pdf/PLAW-111publ3.pdf>

⁵ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. (2021, December 9). Policies and Technology for Interoperability and Burden Reduction | CMS. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Retrieved March 7, 2022, from <https://www.cms.gov/Regulations-and-Guidance/Guidance/Interoperability/index#CMS-Interoperability-and-Patient-Access-Final-Rule>

few questions related to the person's age, location, and the nature of the dental problem. If the problem requires immediate attention, DentistLink connects the user to a provider who can treat urgent problems. DentistLink also provides referrals to additional HCA services like transportation or interpretative services, or childcare from community partners to help people be successful in attending their dental appointments. These services are provided at no cost to patients, dental care providers, or community partners.

DentistLink employs outreach specialists who continuously reach out to oral health provider office locations across the state to ensure the database is up-to-date and presents accurate information to its users. The outreach specialists verify whether a location is accepting new Apple Health patients, any eligibility criteria, and services offered. When the outreach specialists learn of changes at an oral health provider office location, they update the DentistLink database in real-time to ensure that both clients and referral specialists have current and accurate information when searching the online database.

Public-private partnership with Arcora Foundation

HCA executed its contract with Arcora Foundation on December 7, 2021. To collaborate with Arcora Foundation, HCA agreed to:

- Provide quarterly lists of providers that have billed HCA for rendered dental services within the past 12 months.
- Work in partnership with Arcora Foundation on DentistLink marketing and outreach materials to Apple Health enrollees, providing funding for printing, translation, collateral, marketing, advertising, and web development.
- Provide billing and enrollment assistance to providers interested in accepting Apple Health.
- Assist in developing protocols for data analysis to track outcomes post-DentistLink referral to care.
- Submit report(s) as required by the Washington State Legislature, in consultation with Arcora Foundation.
- Set up and attend bi-monthly meetings with Arcora Foundation to improve DentistLink continually.

Arcora Foundation agreed to:

- Provide the DentistLink program to HCA, including the services and staff to accomplish this work.
- Support the public, private, and non-profit partners to connect people across the state to dental care.
 - Including but not limited to:
 - Federally Qualified Health Centers
 - County Public Health Departments
 - Behavioral Health Organizations
- Outreach to oral health care providers to:
 - Identify and add oral health care providers that are not currently in the DentistLink database as accepting new Apple Health enrolled patients;
 - Work to recruit new providers to accept Apple Health enrolled patients; and
 - Assist in connecting oral health care providers to tools and technical assistance that will help providers successfully serve clients enrolled in Apple Health.
- Develop and implement a peer-to-peer recruitment model for oral health care providers to include a support network of experts in serving the populations enrolled in Apple Health.
- Outreach to Apple Health enrollees via advertisements and community partners in collaboration with the HCA communications team, exploring the best and most appropriate tasks for each potential outreach method and role of each partner.
- Coordinate Oral Health Connections (OHC) pilot eligible clients for OHC services referred by an Apple Health Managed Care Organization and community partners.
- Attend community events and information fairs to disseminate DentistLink information.
- Develop new referral relationships with community-based organizations, identifying and targeting community-based organizations in regions of the state with low utilization numbers to refer the populations they serve directly to DentistLink.
- Disseminate resource information to DentistLink users, including:
 - Interpretation and transportation benefits provided by HCA.

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- Other state and federal programs that may be beneficial.
- Connections to organizations and resources addressing other social determinants of health.
- Maintain and continue to improve the DentistLink website by:
 - Ensuring provider information is accurate and consistent; and
 - Improving client experience when finding a provider through DentistLink.
- Track DentistLink utilization.

Although the contract was executed on December 7, 2021, Arcora Foundation has been tracking DentistLink utilization since July 1, 2021. HCA provided Arcora Foundation with the deliverables necessary to continue operating DentistLink before contract execution. HCA received its first semi-annual report from Arcora Foundation, and the initial findings through December 31, 2021, are promising.

Arcora Foundation's recruitment efforts have focused on oral health providers throughout Washington State:

- Outreach specialists have attended more than eight virtual and in-person meetings.
 - To share information, and
 - Actively recruit more provider locations to participate in DentistLink and Apple Health.
- The number of attendees in these meetings ranges from 20 to more than 5,000 participants.
- Locations that provided treatment for clients with Apple Health insurance and accepted new Apple Health clients were active in DentistLink.
 - As of July 1, 2021, 631 oral health provider office locations were listed.
 - By December 31, 2021, 665 oral health provider office locations were listed, an increase of 5.4 percent.

Arcora Foundation has also recruited three dentists to join and participate in the Dental Access Improvement Team. With Arcora Foundation members, these dentists will meet, educate, and recruit other local dentists to participate in DentistLink and Apple Health. As COVID-19 restrictions begin to end, Arcora Foundation will expand its recruitment efforts towards the western side of the state as they meet with other dentists and providers.

During the reporting period from July 1, 2021, through December 31, 2021, individuals accessed DentistLink 25,380 times. This does not represent an unduplicated client count. The same client could have accessed DentistLink multiple times during the reporting period, and Arcora Foundation counts each time the client accesses DentistLink. The individuals accessing DentistLink indicated that they were:

- Enrolled in Apple Health about 95 percent of the time.
- Aged 21 years or older about 83 percent of the time.
- Looking for an oral health provider to complete a dental cleaning or have their teeth evaluated about 45 percent of the time. This appeared to be the most common reason to look for an oral health provider.

Conclusion

In response to [ESSB 5092 \(C 334 L 21\)](#), [section 211\(59\)](#), HCA contracted with Arcora Foundation to continue a partnership that connects Apple Health patients to dental services and reduces barriers to accessing care through DentistLink. During the first six months, HCA has ensured DentistLink has the latest information regarding Apple Health providers and dental benefits and services.

DentistLink increased the number of listed oral health provider office locations by 5.4 percent and expanded its recruitment efforts statewide. Most DentistLink utilization is from individuals reporting that they are enrolled in Apple Health and aged 21 years or older, typically to find oral health providers to complete a dental cleaning or receive an evaluation.

HCA continues to expand the Dental Access Improvement Team to educate and promote DentistLink to other dental providers to participate in DentistLink, especially those in rural areas, and encourage them to accept new Apple Health clients and provide timely access to dental appointments. HCA will continue to work with Arcora Foundation to identify ways to advertise DentistLink, so more clients can use the service to address their oral health care needs. In addition, HCA and Arcora Foundation will continue to develop methods and strategies to strengthen data gathering and evaluation metrics for DentistLink.