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GOVERNOR'S ORAL HEALTH PROPOSALS A MIXED BAG

Dr. Patrick Tepe, a practicing dentist in Verona and president of the Wisconsin Dental Association, today released the following statement regarding the oral health initiative included in Gov. Tony Evers' state budget proposal:

"The WDA's 3,100+ members have long advocated for measures that deliver more care to more patients, and we are pleased that Gov. Evers is making investing in our state's oral health a priority. We support the vast majority of dental access programs outlined in the governor's budget – initiatives like loan repayment assistance for dentists serving rural areas, expansion of the Seal-A-Smile program, and increased funding for low-income dental clinics. We are particularly pleased to see an additional investment in dental care for special needs patients.

"While there is much to applaud in the governor's plan, we are concerned that one aspect – adding a new level of provider, the "dental therapist," to an already underfunded system – is being seen by some as a magic pill to bring dental access to Wisconsin's rural areas and inner cities. With the exception of a handful of counties, workforce studies confirm our state has enough providers. What we need are adequate resources – some of which Gov. Evers has proposed – for the dentists, dental hygienists, community clinics and volunteer clinics already working in these areas to ensure all residents can access comprehensive, regular care.

"We are also greatly concerned that, just one day after an independent evaluation showed an increase in Medicaid patients receiving services in just one year, as well as a 33 percent increase in dentists seeing Medicaid patients, the Governor's budget proposes to end the Medicaid dental pilot program. This would be an enormous step backward for dental practices that have chosen to see a greater number of Medicaid patients, or to see Medicaid for the first time. In addition, the UW Population Health Institute report called for more time to study the effectiveness of the rates, as only one year of data was considered.

"Gov. Evers' plan to boost Medicaid funding based on the percentage of patients seen risks creating winners and losers based on geography. The proposal will likely benefit larger clinics and health systems with the majority of the reimbursement increase, providing an assist to those in urban areas while creating the potential to leave rural residents behind.

"The WDA looks forward to working with Gov. Evers, the Legislature, and our partners throughout the state to develop a practical, viable and immediately workable plan to achieve the goal all of us share – improving the oral health of the people of Wisconsin."

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The Wisconsin Dental Association has 3,100+ member dentists and a number of dental hygienists committed to promoting professional excellence and quality oral health care. With just 3,500 licensed dentists in the state, the WDA is the leading voice for dentistry in Wisconsin. Established in 1870, the WDA is headquartered in West Allis and has a legislative office in Madison. Visit WDA.org and find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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