Dental Care Coordination Informational Guide
For use with Special Needs BasicCare (SNBC) and Prime Health Complete (HMO SNP) members

SNBC and Prime Health Complete Members’ Unique Dental Needs

- This is a medically complex group. The average SNBC/Prime Health Complete enrollee suffers from five or more chronic health conditions such as diabetes, asthma, arthritis, elevated cholesterol, seizures, depression, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance use disorder (SUD). Many of the medications used to treat these conditions are known to have complications that cause increased dental decay and pain.
- Dental pain is known to amplify behavioral health conditions.
- Disabilities may include anomalies to the oral cavity. For example, teeth may be pitted and more prone to decay due to improper formation of the enamel.
- The medical complexity of this group increases the risk for poor oral health, which can lead to other health issues. Inflammation of the gums associated with gum disease can lead to inflammation in the blood vessels and cause systemic diseases such as heart disease and stroke. When the gum layer is disturbed, bacteria present in the mouth can enter the bloodstream and cause inflammation throughout the body (WebMD). Recent research shows a link between the body’s inflammatory response and declined cognitive function, including dementia (University of Southampton). Inhaling bacteria present in the mouth can lead to pneumonia.

Considerations When Scheduling Dental Appointments

- Annual dental visits are important for all members, including those who have no teeth or who wear dentures. Having a dentist perform an oral cancer exam by checking the gums and soft tissue is extremely important. Around 54,010 new cases of oral cavity or oropharyngeal cancer will be diagnosed in 2021 (ACS). The earlier cancer is caught, the better the prognosis. For members with dentures, the stability and comfort of dentures rely on the foundation that supports them. Dentures should be checked for wear and fit so that adjustments can be made as necessary.
- Members with heart defects have an increased risk of bacterial endocarditis. This infection of the inner lining of the heart is caused when bacteria from another part of the body, such as the mouth, spread through the bloodstream and attach to damaged areas of the heart, leading to more damage and sometimes fatal complications. Check with the dentist or medical provider to see if preventive antibiotics are indicated before dental treatment.
- Assist members/remind members to provide a list of all their medications to the dentist when they go to their dental appointment. They also should be prepared to provide pertinent medical history information.
- Extra time may be required to complete dental treatment. SNBC/Prime Health Complete members may be apprehensive and/or lack the level of comprehension needed to cooperate. Encourage members to discuss any special needs or special accommodations they may require at the time the appointment is being scheduled.