TDA Advocacy Efforts Protect Texas Dentists and Patients.

What TDA accomplished in the 86th Texas Legislative Session

Secured Dental Insurance Reform—Protecting Texas Dentists and Patients

TDA secured passage of comprehensive insurance reform for state-regulated insurance that brings much needed relief to dentists. Governor Abbott signed this historic legislation—HB2486—into law on June 14, 2019. Passage of this legislation:

- Requires insurers to create patient benefit web portals for use by patients and dentists
- Prohibits insurers from withholding payment to a dentist because of an alleged “overpayment” to another dentist.

Balance Billing: TDA safeguarded the dentist/patient relationship by ensuring that dentists were not included in legislation specifically designed to protect Texans from surprise medical bills when being treated in emergency rooms. Initial drafts of this legislation included dentists, which would have prevented the ability to “balance bill” patients, thus limiting a patient’s ability to choose his or her dentist.

Other important insurance reforms include SB 1742, which requires health care provider directories to include each provider’s specialty in a searchable format. HB 4533 requires HMOs and PPOs to post detailed information explaining their preauthorization process, and specialty utilization reviews to be conducted by a Texas-licensed dentist.

Improved Texans’ Oral Health and Access to Dental Care

Fluoride: Improving Texans’ oral health and eliminating barriers preventing Texans from accessing dentists are always top priorities of the TDA. This session, TDA protected water fluoridation by working with lawmakers and state water systems to pass HB 3592. This legislation requires entities supplying water to the public to notify the state and its consumers at least 60 days prior to permanently terminating water fluoridation.

Tobacco: TDA facilitated passage of SB 21, otherwise known as “Tobacco 21,” which raises the minimum age to purchase tobacco and vape products to 21 years, excluding active duty military.

Loan Assistance to Dentists: State budget priorities prevented TDA from securing funding for its Dental Education Loan Repayment Program. TDA will pursue funding next session for a rural dental education loan repayment program to place dentists into areas of need.

Protected Medicaid Dental—Funding and Program Enhancements

TDA preserved Medicaid dental funding from state budget cuts and supported legislation to improve Medicaid dental program administration. SB 1207 reduces the overall number of prior authorizations in Medicaid, mandates improvements in Medicaid managed care prior authorization procedures, makes prior authorization denial notices easier to understand and appeal for both dentists and patients, and requires HHSC to use an external reviewer when evaluating provider and patient appeals for medical necessity denials.

TDA supported efforts by Coalition of Texans with Disabilities to create a pilot program under HB 4533 to study currently available Medicaid dental benefits for disabled adults, and determine which benefits would be the most cost-effective to reduce emergency room and in-patient hospitalization of adults with disabilities.

Secured Lawsuit Protection

SB 792 protects dentists and hygienists when volunteering their professional services during a disaster. This legislation allows dentists and hygienists to respond in a disaster without fear of medical liability.

Prevented Unwarranted Scope Expansions

Every session, there are attempts to expand the scope of practice of non-dentists. TDA defeated proposals exposing Texans to a lower standard of dental care by mid-level dental providers, as well as prevented pain control from being in the hands of lesser-trained and lesser-educated individuals. Non-dentist stakeholders sought legislation to independently diagnose patients, treat patients, and bill both commercial insurance and Medicaid. As telehealth technology advances, offering new options for the delivery of dental care, TDA will continue to ensure that any teledentistry efforts uphold current standards of care in dentistry, and emphasize dentist oversight, supervision, and delegation.

Partnered with the Dental Schools

TDA partnered with schools to modify the funding methodology for school clinic operations. The effort didn’t pass this session, but TDA will work with schools on this issue next session.

TDA supports the mission of state-funded, university-based schools, which is to educate students to serve their patients and communities. With the creation of any new dental school, the historical legislative support, including financial support, should be maintained for the existing dental schools in Texas. This session, legislators allocated $20 million in new funding for Texas Tech University School of Dental Medicine at El Paso.

Negotiated Reasonable Prescription Monitoring Requirements

TDA supported legislation creating reasonable measures to help address prescription opioid misuse in Texas. HB 2174 limits the duration of Schedule II controlled substance prescriptions for acute pain; requires electronic prescribing, with certain exceptions; and requires CE in the prescribing and monitoring of opioids. HB 3284 delays mandatory checking of a patient’s Prescription Monitoring Program history until March 1, 2020.

Are you a TDA member? Thanks to the support of our dedicated members, TDA maintains a strong advocacy program on behalf of dentistry in Texas. We’d be honored to have you join us and further strengthen our efforts. For information about becoming a TDA member, please call 800-832-1145.