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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

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State boosts prevention in Medicaid dental care for adults

The step to improve oral health one of several needed; access to providers is still limited

(Juneau, Alaska) — Beginning April 2007 adults enrolled in Medicaid will have coverage for preventive and restorative dental care, the Department of Health and Social Services announced today.

Eligible adults will have coverage for dental services such as exams, cleanings, tooth restorations, crowns, root canals and dentures, up to an annual cap of \$1,150 per person per state fiscal year. Previously only emergency dental care was available for adults enrolled in Medicaid.

“Promoting and protecting the health of Alaskans includes dental health,” said Commissioner Karleen Jackson. “By emphasizing prevention for adult Medicaid recipients we will significantly reduce demand for more expensive emergency dental care, and improve the health of Alaskans.”

It is estimated between 12,000 and 15,000 people will likely use the service, out of 41,000 adults enrolled in Medicaid. The number of people able to take advantage of the expanded benefits may be limited by the availability of dental providers around the state who are accepting new Medicaid clients, although the state is working with dentists to encourage participation.

Missed appointments are a reason dentists often give for not accepting more Medicaid patients. To encourage patients to keep appointments, the state recently clarified in regulation that providers may charge Medicaid patients for missed appointments if that is their policy for non-Medicaid patients.

Legislation passed in 2006 authorized the change to Medicaid; since then the state has worked to complete regulations and receive federal authorization. Recently the State Medicaid Plan was approved by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, state regulations are in place, and Alaska dental Medicaid providers have been informed of the changes.

Additional information on the adult dental Medicaid services including a full list of covered services can be found at: www.hss.state.ak.us/dhcs/dental/. Recipients can also call the First Health recipient helpline at 1-800-780-9972 to answer questions or locate a dentist who is currently accepting new Medicaid patients.