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79 Percent of Older Voters Think Medicare Should Cover Dental, Vision, and Hearing Services, Says New Poll By The Senior Citizens League

(Washington, DC) Medicare doesn't cover routine dental care, vision or hearing services, but a new poll by The Senior Citizens League found that 79 percent of older voters want this to change. "Dental coverage rates drop dramatically once people turn 65 and enroll in Medicare," says Mary Johnson, Medicare and Social Security policy analyst for The Senior Citizens League.

About [two-thirds](#) of working-age Americans are insured by private dental policies offered through their employer or other group, yet once an individual turns 65 and starts Medicare, the employer's dental coverage ends. By age 75, only one-in-four people has dental insurance. "There just aren't many affordable dental options for people living on fixed incomes," Johnson observes.

On average, uninsured older Americans spend about [\\$1,126 out-of-pocket annually](#) on dental care. In years when more extensive work is required, the high cost of dental services can create financial emergencies. People often delay getting needed dental care, a tactic that can backfire. "The delay tactic could cause higher medical bills later, for doctor visits, prescription drugs and other services," Johnson points out.

A growing volume of research is linking problems with teeth and gums to health problems elsewhere in the body. Links have been found to heart disease, diabetes, stroke, respiratory illnesses, cancer and even sleep apnea. Better dental care has been found to improve overall health in patients. "Adding dental coverage may help both patients and Medicare save money on other costs," Johnson says.

Here's how the public responded to The Senior Citizens League's poll: "Under current law, Medicare is prohibited from covering most dental, vision, and hearing services. Congress should..."

- Expand Medicare coverage to include these services. — 79%
- Better promote private Medicare Advantage plans that sometimes cover more of these services. — 14%
- Leave the Medicare program unchanged. — 7%

The Senior Citizens League endorses legislation that would expand Medicare coverage to include essential hearing, vision, and dental services. Called the *Seniors Have Eyes, Ears, and Teeth Act* (H.R. 508), the bipartisan bill introduced by Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (CA-40) has 130 cosponsors in the House of Representatives. To learn more visit www.SeniorsLeague.org.

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With 1.2 million supporters, The Senior Citizens League is one of the nation's largest nonpartisan seniors groups. Its mission is to promote and assist members and supporters, to educate and alert senior citizens about their rights and freedoms as U.S. Citizens, and to protect and defend the benefits senior citizens

have earned and paid for. The Senior Citizens League is a proud affiliate of [TREA: The Enlisted Association](#). Visit www.SeniorsLeague.org for more information.

AVAILABLE TO JOURNALISTS: Human interest interview, info on shopping for dental insurance, tips on where to look for low cost dental care.