Access to dental care in Maryland: a 50-year – *and continuing* – struggle

1967 – Maryland's Medicaid program expands to include dental services for children and adults.

1969 – Maryland dentists begin pulling out of Medicaid as the state exhausts limited reimbursement dollars. Medicaid recipients will now struggle to find care as dentists increasingly cater to those with private insurance.

1976 – Maryland lawmakers cut all Medicaid dental care benefits for poor adults, except for emergency care.

2000 – Maryland provides less dental care to Medicaid children than *any* state in the country; the U.S. Surgeon General calls oral disease in America a public health crisis, a silent epidemic.

The last 10 years: Some long overdue momentum, especially for children, but little real traction for adults…

February 2007 – 12-year-old Deamonte Driver has an abscessed tooth but can't access care because his family's Medicaid coverage has lapsed, a challenge compounded by homelessness and their lack of transportation. Even if Deamonte did have Medicaid coverage, few dentists would have accepted it at the time. Deamonte dies.

2007 – Congressional hearings in the wake of Deamonte's death lead then-Secretary of Health and Mental Hygiene John Colmers to create the Dental Action Coalition (DAC) to address the lack of access to dental care for children by focusing on increasing Medicaid reimbursement, provider participation and capacity, public health strategies and oral health outreach. In 2009, DAC becomes the Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC), an independent statewide oral health coalition.

2010 – The Deamonte Driver Dental Project mobile van makes its maiden voyage to Deamonte's former school in Largo, Maryland. With private and public funding, the project provides dental care for uninsured and underinsured children.

2011 – Dental spending increases. Maryland spends $153 million on Medicaid dental care, up from $43 million in 2007.

2012 – Maryland becomes one of the top 10 states for the number of children with Medicaid who see a dentist.

2012 – With public and private funding, Health Care for the Homeless opens a full-time adult dental practice and serves 469 clients in its first year. With continued private and public support, the agency quadruples its dental practice in 2015-16—from one to four fulltime dentists across three clinical sites and serving 1,276 clients over 4,401 visits.

Reality check: 2014 – More than one-third of Americans can't afford access to dental care. Maryland adults on Medicaid still don't have a dental benefit.

2016 – Maryland is among 15 states that only cover emergency dental benefits for adults under Medicaid, while 17 states provide limited but broader dental coverage and 15 states provide extensive coverage.

Winter 2017 – Maryland's entire House Appropriations Committee co-sponsors HB1158 – allowing local jurisdictions to create an adult dental Medicaid benefit – and sends a strong message to Gov. Larry Hogan that the benefit is a high priority for Maryland. The bill clears the House, but goes no further. Meantime, lawmakers do pass a related bill with Medicaid "intent language," requiring MDAC to study emergency room costs of treating dental conditions in Maryland, with study results due in December 2017—ahead of the 2018 legislative session.

Spring 2017 – Mary Otto's book, *Teeth*, is published; coalition efforts to push dental access in Maryland build—despite potential massive cuts to Medicaid by Congress.

May 2017 – Maryland remains one of only 17 states without an adult dental Medicaid benefit.