The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) is a professional association of over 25,000 physicians, residents, and medical students across all clinical disciplines, organizations, and practice settings. The Medical Society is committed to advocating on behalf of patients, to provide them a better health care system, and on behalf of physicians, to help them provide the best care possible. The Massachusetts Medical Society strongly supports comprehensive prevention, education, cessation, and efforts to prevent morbidity and mortality associated with tobacco use. In pursuing those aims, the MMS strives for health equity.

As such, MMS wishes to be recorded in support of H.1245/S.792, An Act to Provide Medicaid Coverage for Tobacco Cessation. These bills would expand access to the MassHealth smoking cessation program by allowing trained and approved dentists and behavioral health practitioners and others who work with people most affected by tobacco to provide, and bill for, cessation counseling to patients on MassHealth, as recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC).

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States, claiming more than 400,000 lives prematurely every year.\(^1\) Smoking not only takes the lives of those who use tobacco, but also those who are exposed to secondhand smoke. Furthermore, smokeless tobacco has been linked to greater incidence of fatal heart attacks and strokes.\(^2\)

There is no tobacco product that is safe to use. Smoking costs the U.S. economy approximately $300 billion each year, including $133 to $176 billion for direct medical costs and $151 billion for lost productivity related to premature death.\(^3\)

The Centers for Disease and Prevention lists smoking (current or former) as one of the conditions from which individuals are more likely to become severely ill from COVID-19. The country, and the Commonwealth, have previously seen the effects of vaping on some individuals who suffered from and/or died from e-cigarette or vaping use-associated lung injury (EVALI).\(^4\)

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved tobacco cessation treatment as an evidence-based means to help tobacco users quit. It has also proven to be highly cost-effective, even though it is very difficult for people to quit this deadly, addictive habit.\(^5\) There is a strong relationship between the length of time patients have in behavior counseling sessions, the amount of time they are able to spend with their health care providers and successful treatment outcomes.\(^6\)

The 2006 landmark Massachusetts health care reform law mandated tobacco cessation coverage for the Massachusetts Medicaid population. Upon implementation of the benefit, MassHealth subscribers were allowed two 90-day courses per year of FDA-approved medications for smoking cessation, including over-the-counter medications like nicotine replacement therapy, and up to 16 individual or group counseling sessions. Within the first two years of implementation, over 70,000 MassHealth recipients used the...
benefit, and the smoking rate declined from 38% to 28%. Additional research with the program showed that the comprehensive coverage led to reduced hospitalizations for heart attacks and a net savings of $10.5 million, or a $3.07 return on investment for every dollar spent. Savings will likely continue to increase as time goes on and the impact of quitting in this population increases.

While the success of the ongoing MassHealth, comprehensive cessation benefit has been well documented, it can limit who can be reimbursed for providing the recommended counseling. The original language in Chapter 58 provides for “counseling by a physician, certified tobacco-use cessation counselor, or other qualified clinician”. To expand the number of patients being provided the counseling part of the approved treatments, HB 1245 and SB 792 would allow for trained and certified dentists, behavioral health counselors and mental health counselors to be reimbursed as well.

The Society recognizes and continues to celebrate the first-in-the-nation 2019 law prohibiting the sale of all flavored tobacco products in the Commonwealth. That law also codified the MassHealth benefit and expanded coverage to all insurance, including private insurance and the Group Insurance Commission (GIC). HB 1245 and SB 792 would continue this vital work by expanding the number of certified practitioners available to provide evidence-based counseling for those seeking assistance in quitting tobacco use.

The MMS urges the Committee on Health Care Financing to report H.1245/S.792 out of Committee favorably.

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