

June 9, 2021

The Honorable Lisa Blunt Rochester
U.S. House of Representatives
1724 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Blunt Rochester:

On behalf of the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) and its 40,000 members, I would like to thank you for introducing H.R.2295, the *HIV Epidemic Loan-Repayment Program (HELP) Act*. We strongly support the *HELP Act* and its provisions to establish a new loan repayment program for clinicians, such as general dentists, who provide service as HIV treatment employees.

AGD believes the proposed program would be instrumental in helping to ensure the HIV health provider workforce is robust, which will in turn hopefully allow people living with HIV to access necessary HIV treatment and services.

As general dentists, we know oral health is essential to general health and well-being at every stage of life, but all too often, health policies view the mouth separately from the rest of the body. As you know, a weakened immune system makes it harder to fight off infection, which puts people living with HIV at particular risk for developing oral health problems. The mouth can be one of the first parts of the body to be affected when a person is infected with HIV. Some of the most common oral problems are gingivitis, periodontitis, dry mouth, canker sores, thrush, and dental caries.

Dental and mouth problems related to HIV can be painful, which can cause trouble chewing or swallowing. This may prevent a person from taking their HIV medication. It can also result in malnutrition, as a person may have difficulty eating and absorbing enough essential nutrients. Additionally, a compromised digestive system may affect the absorption of HIV drug treatment.

The upside is that most oral health problems related to HIV are treatable. The best way to address or prevent these issues is for a person living with HIV to visit a dentist regularly, practice good oral hygiene, and take HIV medicine on schedule.

By offering up to \$250,000 in educational loan repayment to clinicians and dentists in exchange for up to five years of service at Ryan White-funded clinical sites and health professional shortage areas, the *HELP Act* will bolster the HIV workforce and consequently help eliminate a barrier to maintaining oral health for people living with HIV.



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AGD appreciates your commitment to improving the lives of people with HIV and ending the U.S. HIV epidemic. AGD stands ready to work with you and your staff to generate support for the *HELP Act* and future shared interests. If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Daniel J. Buksa, JD, Associate Executive Director of Public Affairs, by phone at (312) 440-4328 or via email at daniel.buksa@agd.org to let us know how we may be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Cassis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bruce Cassis, D.D.S., MAGD
President
Academy of General Dentistry

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Myron Bromberg', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Myron (Mike) Bromberg, D.D.S.
Congressional Liaison
Academy of General Dentistry