

# Brace, or Embrace?

## Healthcare reform and dentistry: Supply chain implications

**J**ust as the Supreme Court decision regarding the Affordable Care Act will affect healthcare providers, patients and payers, so too will it affect the dental products and equipment distributors.

“We’re excited about the Affordable Care Act’s potential impact on dentistry, especially access-to-care for those who are less fortunate,” says Chuck Cohen, managing director, Benco Dental. “We’re especially bullish on the expansion of the community health center network across the nation, because CHCs offer an affordable delivery system for low-income individuals. As an industry, and a healthcare system, we need to improve access to dental care – and any reasonable effort to address this issue will benefit all of us.”

Cohen is more tentative about the Supreme Court’s decision to throw out that aspect of the Affordable Care Act that would have allowed the federal government to withhold Medicaid funds to states that don’t expand their Medicaid programs.

“I don’t think that anyone can answer [how that will affect oral healthcare],” he says. “We have to wait until we see how this provision is implemented by federal and state governments. Clearly, if fewer resources are dedicated to Medicaid, fewer resources will be dedicated to dental care that’s reimbursed through Medicaid. We need to wait and see.”

### Overall dental demand

The Supreme Court decision “will be beneficial, as it should grow overall dental demand,” says Lori Paulson, vice president, marketing and dental programs, National Distribution & Contracting, the Nashville, Tenn.-based member service organization that provides distribution, logistics and other services to 300 independent medical, rehabilitation and dental product distributors. Paulson expects some broad trends to continue, such as the use of

auxiliaries for expanded procedures, and the integration of oral health with general health.

### Care for all

Stanley Bergman, chairman and CEO of Henry Schein, points out that through the Affordable Care Act, “nearly 8 million children will be eligible for dental coverage through the state health insurance exchanges free of annual and lifetime caps. The Act also includes nearly two dozen provisions that aim to improve the oral health of all Americans.

“The Act also represents an integrated and strategic plan to address oral health through prevention and health promotion, coverage and financing, workforce and training, infrastructure and surveillance, and an improved oral health safety net,” he adds.

“From Henry Schein’s perspective, it is essential that the Act passes guidelines to certify dental health records, so the investment to incorporate [electronic health records] in dentistry is available to the profession. Although many of the public health provisions await funding, this is a clear recognition that dental disease

remains a silent epidemic in America, especially among children, and can only be eliminated by improving the entire oral health system.

“At Henry Schein, we believe everyone deserves access to basic health care, and we’re committed to doing our part to expand access. We also believe that society agrees on expanding access to care for all. The key question is how to pay for it. We don’t think there’s a single answer to this question, but we can suggest a process for getting to an answer. It has to be through public-private partnerships. Government should not and cannot finance this alone, especially given the structure of American health care. All elements of society need to partner together to achieve this goal of providing access to basic care.” **[F1]**

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