

Dental Care for Our Troops Act

Senators Baldwin, Capito and Blumenthal

The military's reserve components must maintain trained and healthy forces available for mobilization or deployment. Still, reserve component servicemembers are not provided the same benefits to maintain their readiness as those on active duty. Despite being responsible for their own deployability, reserve component service members must cover their own dental insurance and dental procedures. This policy impacts the readiness of our total force and leaves us less prepared as a nation. The Dental Care for Our Troops Act would provide reserve component servicemembers with consistent, year-round access to premium-free dental care to ensure they are ready to deploy and serve our country when called upon.

The Dental Care for Our Troops Act would provide all Reserve and National Guard members access to premium-free dental coverage.

This legislation would waive premiums and co-pays in the TRICARE Dental Program for all members of the reserve components. Increasing access to preventive dental care will reduce costly emergency dental treatment and improve readiness for our total force military. **The provisions included in this act have no direct spending implications.**

Guaranteeing dental for our troops would pay dividends in readiness as well as in recruitment and retention. There is a House bipartisan companion bill led by Rep. Kim (D-NJ) and Rep. Trent Kelly (R-MS).

Background:

Dental health is vital to military readiness, and is one of the six reportable medical metrics that determine a servicemember's medical deployability.¹ During the post-9/11 period, more than 20 percent of guard and reserve members were non-deployable, and another 15 percent were removed from duty during deployment due to dental issues.²

Preventive dental care is vital for the total force. Cigna Health calculates that adults who practice preventive oral health care can save 31 percent in dental costs over five years. Likewise, adults who don't receive preventive care can expect a 43 percent increase to their annual dental costs over the same period of time.³ Letting reserve component servicemembers go without dental insurance presents a readiness and total cost risk.

Despite making up almost half of our armed forces, reserve component servicemembers still do not have access to the continuous preventative dental care needed to maintain dental readiness for deployments. Reserve component servicemembers are held to the same deployment and readiness standards as active duty personnel, with a dental exam required annually. The Reserve Health Readiness Program provides free vouchers for the exam, but reserve component servicemembers are responsible for paying for any follow-on treatment needed to deploy. While there are cases where the Army will pay to treat the most critical dental issues, this level of care is inconsistent across the various armed forces.⁴

Supporting Organizations: VoteVets, Reserve Organization of America, National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), Naval Enlisted Reserve Association, Air Force Sergeants Association

¹ <https://www.esd.whs.mil/portals/54/documents/dd/issuances/dodi/602519p.pdf>

² <https://academic.oup.com/milmed/article/179/6/666/4160811?login=true>

³ <https://www.cigna.com/static/www-cigna-com/docs/employers-brokers/dental-white-paper.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.health.mil/Military-Health-Topics/Health-Readiness/Reserve-Health-Readiness-Program/Our-Services>