

Office of Medicaid BOARD OF HEARINGS

Appellant Name and Address:



Appeal Decision:	Denied	Appeal Number:	2403301
Decision Date:	4/4/2024	Hearing Date:	4/3/2024
Hearing Officer:	David Jacobs		

Appearance for Appellant:



Appearance for MassHealth:

Dr. Carl Perlmutter, Consulting Orthodontist



*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Office of Medicaid
Board of Hearings
100 Hancock Street, Quincy, Massachusetts 02171*

APPEAL DECISION

Appeal Decision:	Denied	Issue:	Prior Authorization - Orthodontics
Decision Date:	4/4/2024	Hearing Date:	4/3/2024
MassHealth's Rep.:	Dr. Carl Perlmutter	Appellant's Rep.:	[REDACTED]
Hearing Location:	Remote		

Authority

This hearing was conducted pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 118E, Chapter 30A, and the rules and regulations promulgated thereunder.

Jurisdiction

Through a notice dated February 7, 2024, MassHealth denied the appellant's request for prior authorization of comprehensive orthodontic treatment (Exhibit 1). The appellant filed this appeal in a timely manner on March 5, 2024 (see 130 CMR 610.015(B) and Exhibit 2). Denial of a request for prior authorization is a valid basis for appeal (see 130 CMR 610.032).

Action Taken by MassHealth

MassHealth denied the appellant's request for prior authorization of comprehensive orthodontic treatment.

Issue

The appeal issue is whether MassHealth was within its discretion in determining that the appellant is ineligible for comprehensive orthodontic treatment.

Summary of Evidence

The appellant, a minor under the age of [REDACTED], was represented at hearing by his parents. The

MassHealth representative, a licensed orthodontist, appeared for MassHealth on behalf of DentaQuest, the MassHealth dental contractor. Below is a summary of each party's testimony and the information submitted for hearing:

The appellant's orthodontic provider ("the provider") submitted a prior authorization request for comprehensive orthodontic treatment to DentaQuest on behalf of the appellant on February 6, 2024. This request included the appellant's X-rays, photographs, and a completed MassHealth Handicapping Labio-Lingual Deviations (HLD) Form (Exhibit 4).

MassHealth will only provide coverage for comprehensive orthodontic treatment for members who have a "severe, handicapping, or deforming" malocclusion. Such a condition exists when the applicant has either (1) dental discrepancies that result in a score of 22 or more points on the HLD Form, as detailed in the MassHealth Dental Manual, or (2) evidence of a group of exceptional or handicapping dental conditions. If the applicant meets any of these qualifications, MassHealth, through DentaQuest, will approve a request for prior authorization for comprehensive orthodontic treatment. Alternatively, a provider, such as the applicant's primary care physician or pediatrician, can submit a narrative and supporting documentation detailing how the treatment is medically necessary.

In this case, the appellant's provider submitted a HLD score of 22, and indicated on the HLD form that the appellant auto-qualifies for treatment because he has an impinging overbite with evidence of occlusal contact into the opposing soft tissue (Exhibit 4).

When DentaQuest initially evaluated this prior authorization request on behalf of MassHealth, its orthodontists did not find any of the conditions that would warrant automatic approval of comprehensive orthodontic treatment and determined that the appellant has an HLD score of 17. The DentaQuest HLD Form reflects the following scores:

Conditions Observed	Score
Overjet in mm	3
Overbite in mm	6
Mandibular Protrusion in mm	0
Open Bite in mm	0
Ectopic Eruption (# of teeth, excluding third molars)	0
Anterior Crowding	5
Labio-Lingual Spread, in mm (anterior spacing)	3
Posterior Unilateral Crossbite	0

Posterior impactions or congenitally missing posterior teeth	0
Total HLD Score	17

(Exhibit 4). Having found an HLD score below the threshold of 22, no auto-qualifying conditions, and no medical necessity, MassHealth denied the appellant's prior authorization request (Exhibit 1).

At hearing, the MassHealth representative testified that after examining the appellant, he found that the appellant's HLD did not reach the required 22 points. He also disagreed with the provider's evaluation that the appellant had an impinging overbite with evidence of occlusal contact into the opposing soft tissue. He testified that his primary place of disagreement with the appellant's orthodontist is that he did not find at least 3.5mm or more of crowding in the appellant's upper arch to allow for an additional 5 points to be rewarded as the appellant's orthodontist did (Exhibit 4). Furthermore, he did not find evidence of an impinging overbite with occlusal contact into the opposing soft tissue.

The appellant's parents appeared in-person alongside the appellant. The appellant's father testified that he believes the appellant has a medical need for braces and does not understand how the appellant's orthodontist and the consulting orthodontist could disagree about the measurable fact of how much crowding is in the appellant's upper arch.

Findings of Fact

Based on a preponderance of the evidence, I find the following:

1. The appellant's provider requested prior authorization for comprehensive orthodontic treatment and submitted an Orthodontics Prior Authorization Form, an HLD Form, photographs and x-rays.
2. The provider found that the appellant possesses an auto-qualifying condition of an impinging overbite with evidence of occlusal contact into the opposing soft tissue, found an HLD score of 22, and declined to submit a medical necessity narrative.
3. On February 7, 2024, MassHealth denied the appellant's prior authorization request, as DentaQuest found an HLD score of 17 and did not agree that there was evidence of any auto-qualifying condition.
4. The appellant timely appealed the denial to the Board of Hearings.
5. The MassHealth representative testified to finding an HLD score of below 22 with no

exceptional handicapping dental condition.

6. The appellant has less than 3.5mm of crowding in the upper arch of his teeth.

Analysis and Conclusions of Law

MassHealth pays only for medically necessary services to eligible MassHealth members and may require that medical necessity be established through the prior authorization process. 130 CMR 420.410(A)(1). A service is "medically necessary" if:

- (1) it is reasonably calculated to prevent, diagnose, prevent the worsening of, alleviate, correct, or cure conditions in the member that endanger life, cause suffering or pain, cause physical deformity or malfunction, threaten to cause or to aggravate a handicap, or result in illness or infirmity; and
- (2) there is no other medical service or site of service, comparable in effect, available, and suitable for the member requesting the service, that is more conservative or less costly to MassHealth.

130 CMR 450.204(A). Medical necessity for dental and orthodontic treatment must be shown in accordance with the regulations governing dental treatment codified at 130 CMR 420.000 and in the MassHealth *Dental Manual*. Specifically, 130 CMR 420.431(C)(3) states, in relevant part:

The MassHealth agency pays for comprehensive orthodontic treatment, subject to prior authorization, only once per member per lifetime for a member younger than 21 years old and only when the member has a handicapping malocclusion. The MassHealth agency determines whether a malocclusion is handicapping based on clinical standards for medical necessity as described in Appendix D of the *Dental Manual*.

Those clinical standards for medical necessity are met when (1) the member has one of the "auto-qualifying" conditions described by MassHealth in the HLD Form,¹ (2) the member meets or exceeds the threshold score designated by MassHealth on the HLD Form, or (3) comprehensive orthodontic treatment is otherwise medically necessary for the member, as demonstrated by a medical-necessity narrative and supporting documentation submitted by

¹ Auto-qualifying conditions include cleft palate, severe traumatic deviation, severe maxillary or mandibular crowding or spacing, deep impinging overbite, anterior impaction, overjet greater than 9 mm, or reverse overjet greater than 3.5 mm, anterior or posterior crossbite of 3 or more maxillary teeth per arch, 2 or more of at least one congenitally missing tooth per quadrant, and anterior or lateral open bite of 2mm or more or 4 or more teeth per arch. Appendix D at D-2 and D-5.

the requesting provider. *See generally*, Appendix D of the *Dental Manual*. In such circumstances, MassHealth will approve payment for comprehensive orthodontic treatment. 130 CMR 420.431(C)(3).

Appendix D of the *Dental Manual* includes the HLD form, which is described as “a quantitative, objective method for evaluating [prior authorization] requests for comprehensive orthodontic treatment.” Appendix D at D-1. The HLD form allows for the identification of those auto-qualifying conditions and also provides the method for discerning a single score, “based on a series of measurements, which represent the presence, absence, and degree of handicap.” *Id.* MassHealth will authorize treatment for cases with verified auto-qualifiers or verified scores of 22 and above. *Id.* at D-2.

Providers may also establish eligibility for comprehensive orthodontic treatment by submitting a medical necessity narrative from a physician that indicates that comprehensive orthodontic treatment is medically necessary to treat a handicapping malocclusion, including to correct or significantly ameliorate certain medical or dental conditions. *Id.* at D-3-4.

While a MassHealth member may benefit from orthodontic treatment, the regulations clearly limit eligibility for such treatment to patients with handicapping malocclusions. 130 CMR 420.431(C)(3). As such, the appellant bears the burden of showing that he has an HLD score of 22 or higher, an auto-qualifying condition, or that the treatment is otherwise medically necessary. He has failed to do so.

The MassHealth representative’s sworn testimony is that his examination of the appellant resulted in a HLD score below the required 22 points. Furthermore, he credibly explained that he did not find an impinging overbite with evidence of occlusal contact into the opposing soft tissue in the appellant’s mouth. Although the appellant’s father argued that he believes the appellant has a medical need for braces and criticizes how two experts can disagree on what should be measurable fact of crowding, only the appellant’s records were submitted as evidence and the provider orthodontist did not testify at hearing. As such, the consulting orthodontist’s expert, in-person testimony is found to be more credible for the amount of crowding in the appellant’s upper arch. Therefore, as the consulting orthodontist found an HLD score below 22 points, no auto-qualifying conditions, and no medical necessity narrative was submitted, MassHealth was thereby within its discretion to deny the appellant’s request for prior authorization for comprehensive orthodontic treatment.

The appeal is DENIED.

If the appellant’s dental condition should worsen or her orthodontist is able to provide the necessary documentation to demonstrate that the treatment is medically necessary, a new prior authorization request can be filed at that time.

Order for MassHealth

None.

Notification of Your Right to Appeal to Court

If you disagree with this decision, you have the right to appeal to Court in accordance with Chapter 30A of the Massachusetts General Laws. To appeal, you must file a complaint with the Superior Court for the county where you reside, or Suffolk County Superior Court, within 30 days of your receipt of this decision.

David Jacobs
Hearing Officer
Board of Hearings

cc:

MassHealth Representative: DentaQuest 1, MA