

Statement of Chairman Tom Davis
Government Reform Subcommittee on the Civil Service
Hearing on Dental and Vision Benefits in the FEHBP

Tuesday, February 24, 2004

Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this important hearing today.

All of us here recognize the importance of the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program as we seek to recruit and retain the best federal workforce that this country has to offer. FEHBP covers over 8.6 million individuals, including 2.2 million federal and postal employees, 1.9 million federal annuitants, and 4.5 million dependents. There is no disputing that the FEHBP offers the widest selection of health plans in the country, enabling enrollees to compare the costs, benefits, and features of different plans.

However, this program will not remain a model for excellence in employer-provided healthcare coverage unless we continue to explore avenues to enhance the care and choice provided.

While dental benefits are currently available under most plans in the FEHBP, coverage is very limited. In addition, vision care is only available through HMOs. Over 15 years ago, OPM stopped allowing plans to add new dental and vision packages or to increase packages they already had in place, and consequently, the FEHBP has not kept pace in these areas. Today, an overwhelming majority of private-sector plans provide dental and vision coverage. In addition, numerous surveys have shown that federal employees and annuitants are very clear on this issue - more than any other benefit, they want better coverage for dental and vision care.

It's time to determine how to add dental and vision care to the insurance options provided under the FEHBP. H.R. 3751 provides a starting point to address this issue, requiring the Office of Personnel Management to submit a report to Congress outlining options available to provide dental and vision benefits to enrollees.

I commend the Subcommittee for taking a look at this issue today and look forward to working with all of you on this and other efforts to provide comprehensive, high-quality, affordable healthcare for our dedicated federal employees, annuitants and their families. The government's number one resource is its people, and they deserve nothing less.