



Fact Sheet

Oral Health in America Advances and Challenges

A Report from the National Institutes of Health

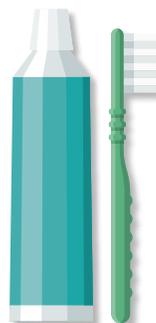
Section 4: Oral Health Workforce, Education, Practice, and Integration

Key Summary

- Today's oral health workforce includes not only dentists, but other oral health professionals, such as dental therapists, public health dental hygienists, and community dental health coordinators and medical colleagues who provide oral health assessment and prevention.
- Although there are more oral health providers in the U.S. than in 2000, today about 60 million Americans live in areas (mostly rural) where there are too few oral health professionals to meet local needs.
- Enrollment in dental and allied education programs is at an all-time high. Racial and ethnic diversity within these professions is increasing modestly, and about half of recent dental graduates are women.
- The high student debt resulting from the cost of dental education may inappropriately drive the shape of the oral health workforce increasing the likelihood that graduates will choose to practice in affluent areas, rather than seek faculty, research, or public health opportunities in underserved areas.
- More people have public or private dental insurance than 20 years ago, yet accessibility and services remain limited, and the majority of dentists do not accept Medicaid dental insurance. Oral health professionals must be willing to accept all types of dental insurance.
- Most oral health care occurs in private practices, yet people increasingly receive care where they live, work, and learn—including in community health centers, government-run clinics, dental schools, or in schools, long-term care facilities, mobile practices, and other settings.
- Strategies for the integration of oral and general health care delivery are emerging. Improving adults' access to dental care will require a multipronged approach and coordinated efforts among policymakers, insurers, and dental professionals.
- State practice acts regulating the services that oral health professionals provide often reduce access to dental care by limiting geographic mobility and make it difficult to recruit oral health professionals to work in different settings.
- The development of safety measures, quality measures, and dental diagnostic codes (rather than procedure codes) are necessary to improve and advance the quality of outcomes for oral health care.

Call to Action

- Improving access to oral health care can be achieved by recognizing dental care as an essential health benefit for all Americans, expanding dental coverage for the uninsured, encouraging new professional models, and by providing educational opportunities that encourage interprofessional learning and the delivery of care in new settings.



www.nidcr.nih.gov/oralhealthinamerica

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