Oral Health

Good oral health means being free of mouth pain, tooth decay, tooth loss, oral and throat cancer, gum (periodontal) disease, and other diseases that affect the mouth and surrounding structures. Oral health is integral to general health throughout the life span and can be achieved by everyone. Many systemic diseases may initially start with and be identified through oral symptoms.[1]

Healthiest Wisconsin 2020
Oral Health Objectives

- **Assure access for better oral health**
- **Assure access to services for all population groups**

Wisconsin ranks 9th in the nation for the percent of the population visiting a dental health professional in the last year and 24th for dentists per 100,000 population.[2,3]

Youth

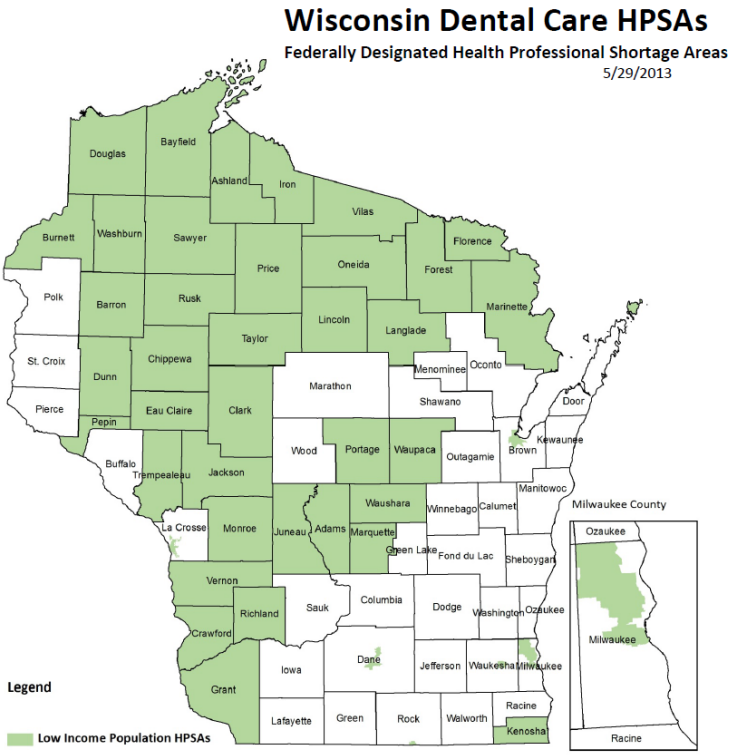
- The percentage of third-grade children with untreated tooth decay decreased by 35% from the 2001-2002 school year to the 2007-2008 school year.
- School-based dental sealant programs have expanded rapidly since the 2009-2010 school year.
- Twenty-six percent of children in Head Start (aged 3-5) had untreated decay.
- Schools with a higher proportion of students from low income households were considerably more likely to have children with untreated tooth decay than schools with a higher SES population.
- One in three Asian, Black, or Hispanic third-grade children had untreated tooth decay, compared to one in six White children.

Adults

- Among Medicaid/Badgercare+ enrollees, 25% had a dental service in the past year.
- Emergency department visits for non-traumatic dental complaints increased by 20% from 2006 to 2010.
- 40% of adults had at least one permanent tooth removed due to tooth decay or gum disease.
- 30% did not visit a dentist within the past year.
- 75% of Medicaid/Badgercare+ enrollees did not have a dental service in the past year.
- Compared to Whites and Asians, Black, Hispanic, and American Indian adults were significantly more likely to have permanent teeth removed due to tooth decay or
- gum disease, and not to have visited a dentist, dental hygienist, or dental clinic in the past year.
- Permanent tooth removal and lack of dental visits are significantly more common among people earning lower incomes.
- More than half of adults with a disability had at least one permanent tooth removed due to tooth decay or gum
- disease, while more than one-third did not have a dental visit in the past year.

Dental Care Access and Utilization[4]

Among Wisconsin adults, 70.1% self-report a visit to a dental health professional within the last 12 months. Iowa and Minnesota have similar rates, while only 63.9% of Illinois adults report visiting a dental health professional. In Wisconsin, there is an average of 56 dentists per 100,000 population. Some of Wisconsin's regional neighbors fare slightly better – Illinois (66.7), Michigan (61.4), and Minnesota (60.6), while Iowa (51.9) and Indiana (47.4) fare worse. Wisconsin's dental workforce has remained relatively stable between 51.3 (2008) and 56.8 (2003).



Disparities in Access and Utilization[5]

A review of 2008 National Health Interview Survey data revealed that adults with Medicaid were nearly five times as likely to have poor oral health as adults with private health insurance. Among people who reported having an oral health problem nationally, cost and lack of dental coverage were identified as the primary reasons they did not seek medical attention.

Children and pregnant women enrolled in Wisconsin Medicaid/BadgerCare+ were enrolled in comprehensive dental coverage. However, enrollees may have had a difficult time finding a Medicaid-certified dentist taking new patients. Thus, coverage does not necessarily translate to access to available services.

What's Being Done

- ✓ Water Fluoridation – nearly 90% of the population on public water systems had access to fluoridated water in Wisconsin in 2010 (exceeding national target of 80%)
- ✓ Seal-A-Smile Program – 40% of eligible schools participating in 2010

What Can Be Done

- o Improve the accessibility to oral health care services for individuals from vulnerable populations, such as adults with developmental disabilities and older adults in nursing homes
- o Expand access to early oral health interventions
- o Support and expand school and community-based oral health programs
- o Increase awareness of the connection between oral health and overall health
- o Improve oral health literacy

[1] Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 Oral Health Focus Area
[2] America's Health Rankings 2015
[3] Yang A; Olson, MA. The Oral Health of Wisconsin's Adults, 2015. Wisconsin Oral Health Program, Wisconsin Department of Health Services.
[4] Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 Baseline and Health Disparities Report 2014
[5] Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 Baseline and Health Disparities Report 2014