



Missed Connections

Providers and Consumers Want More Medical-Dental Integration

Oral health and overall health are inextricably linked. There is mounting evidence to suggest that poor oral health is related to a [variety of chronic health conditions](#), such as high blood pressure, dementia, diabetes, and obesity. Despite this known connection, dental care is still largely siloed from medical care. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that integrating basic health screenings into a dental setting could save the health care system up to \$100 million every year.¹

CareQuest Institute for Oral Health conducted a nationally representative survey in January and February 2021 to assess consumers' perspectives on oral and overall health (n=5,320). CareQuest Institute also conducted a nationwide survey of oral health providers to assess perspectives and current behaviors related to interprofessional practice (n=377). Consumers and oral health providers described a lack of integration between medical and oral health care, and a desire for increased interprofessional collaboration.

Key Findings:

Medical-dental collaboration is currently uncommon.



63% of consumers report that their **primary medical doctor** “rarely” or “never” asks about their oral health.



33% of consumers report that their **oral health provider** “rarely” or “never” asks about their overall health.



45% of responding oral health providers report “rarely” integrating their care with clinicians outside of dentistry, with only **14%** reporting it is part of their “daily” practice.

- **Less than a third** of consumers report receiving general health screenings from their oral health provider.
- **A majority (89%)** of adults report never receiving a referral from their oral health provider to a non-oral health professional.
- **Almost a fourth (24%)** of participating oral health providers report **currently implementing interprofessional practice.**

Consumers understand that oral and overall health are connected.

Consumers believed that a variety of serious chronic medical conditions are linked to the health of their teeth, mouth and gums.



82%

believe that **oral and throat cancer** are linked to oral health.



48%

believe that **heart disease** is linked to oral health.



37%

believe that **depression and anxiety** are linked to oral health.



29%

believe that **diabetes** is linked to oral health.

Health screenings in dental offices are an underutilized opportunity for preventive care.

Most consumers surveyed report they are comfortable receiving health screenings from their oral health provider.

83%

are comfortable with an oral cancer screening.

75%

are comfortable with blood pressure screening.

70%

are comfortable with COVID-19 screening.

65%

are comfortable with diabetes screening.

62%

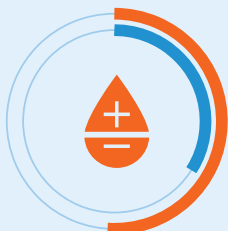
are comfortable with body mass index (BMI) screening.



Over 90%

of oral health providers surveyed agree that **dietary habits** should be assessed in all patients.

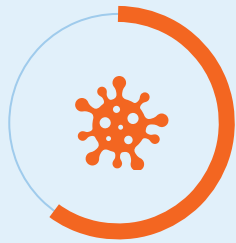
Oral health providers need tools to perform health screenings.



While only **one third (34%)** of oral health providers indicate that they currently screen patients for diabetes,

half (51%) of providers indicate that they would be more willing to screen if they had better tools to identify those at risk for diabetes.

Dental offices are an untapped resource for vaccine distribution.



Almost two thirds (60%)

of consumers say they would consider **receiving a COVID-19 vaccine from their dentist.**



More than a third (35%)

of adults report that they would consider **receiving a flu vaccine from their dentist.**

Co-location of dental and medical services is desired.



Most consumers (69%)

say they prefer to have their **medical and dental insurance provided through the same insurance company.**



Almost a third (30%)

of adults state that they would be **more likely to seek dental care if their dentist and doctor were located in the same place.**

Methodology:

The State of Oral Health Equity in America 2021 is a nationally representative survey of consumer and patient attitudes, experiences, and behaviors related to oral health. It was designed by CareQuest Institute for Oral Health. The survey was conducted in January and February 2021, on adults aged 18 and older, by NORC at the University of Chicago as part of the AmeriSpeak panel. AmeriSpeak is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. Randomly selected US households were sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame. Sampled households were contacted by US mail, telephone, and field interviewers. A sampling unit of 16,986 was used, with a final sample size of 5,320; the final weighted cumulative response rate was 5.2%. All data presented account for appropriate sample weights. Margin of error for the survey is 1.86%.

CareQuest Institute for Oral Health assembled a research panel of DentaQuest-enrolled providers to conduct a series of quarterly online surveys to further examine the trends, patterns, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in dentistry. The request to join the research panel was sent to 22,075 providers. Of these, 575 providers agreed to participate in the panel and were eligible for participation, for a participation rate of 2.5%. Eligibility was assessed by age (18+) and having a high degree of familiarity with their dental office's patient volume, staffing, dental insurance carriers, treatment protocols, and the office's pre-and post-COVID finances. The research panel is substantially similar to the dental population as a whole in terms of geographic distribution, specialty, and gender. The results in this report come from the first quarterly survey, which was fielded from March 9 to April 2, 2021. Up to four reminders were sent to prompt completion. A total of 377 dental providers partially or fully completed the survey, for a response rate of 63% of those who agreed to participate on the research panel.

References

1. "Return on Investment," Centers Disease Control and Prevention, accessed November 22, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/fast-facts/roi/index.html>.

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