

## Oral Health in People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

# What National Data Shows—and Why Action Matters

### Why This Matters

Intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) comprise a heterogeneous group of lifelong conditions, such as intellectual disability and autism, that affect how people learn, communicate, and function every day.

- People with IDD disproportionately face more barriers to dental care and consequently can have poorer oral health (e.g., higher rates of cavities and gum disease) than people without IDDs.
- Poor oral health contributes to preventable pain and infection, increased emergency department visits, and higher health care costs.

### What This Data Shows

Analyses of three large datasets from CareQuest Institute for Oral Health tell a consistent story about oral health inequities faced by individuals with IDD.

**Three times as many individuals with IDD said they could not afford dental care (15%)** compared to those without IDD (5%).<sup>1</sup>

#### Not Able to Afford Dental Insurance



With IDD **15%**

Without IDD **5%**

#### Delayed Dental Care Due to Cost



With IDD **22%**

Without IDD **8%**

**More individuals with IDD delayed their dental care due to cost (22%)** than those without IDD (8%).<sup>1</sup>



Regardless of dental insurance type (commercial/private or Medicaid), **individuals with cognitive disabilities were significantly more likely to have visited an emergency department for a non-traumatic dental condition** than those without IDD when controlling for age, gender, and race/ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Analysis of 2021–2023 Medical Expenditures Panel Survey (MEPS) data by CareQuest Institute for Oral Health; IDD designation based on ICD-10 codes.

<sup>2</sup> Analysis of 2021–2023 Merative Medicaid and commercial medical and dental claims data by CareQuest Institute for Oral Health; cognitive disability designation based on self-report or report by household member.

Adults with cognitive disabilities were more likely to have at least one oral health problem in the prior year (82%) and were also more likely to have had at least one tooth removed due to decay or gum disease (59%) than adults without IDD (51% and 46%, respectively).<sup>3</sup>

#### Likelihood of at Least One Oral Health Problem in the Prior Year



With IDD 82%

Without IDD 51%

#### Likelihood of Having at Least One Tooth Removed Due to Decay or Gum Disease



With IDD 59%

Without IDD 46%

#### Adults Who Rate Their Oral Health as Fair or Poor



With IDD 41%

Without IDD 22%

Nearly twice as many adults with cognitive disabilities rate their oral health as fair or poor (41%; as opposed to excellent, very good, or good) compared to adults without IDD (22%).<sup>3</sup>

## What This Data Suggests

- Many individuals with IDD face economic, social, and [other barriers](#) that keep them from receiving necessary dental care. Relatedly, individuals with IDD often have poorer oral health outcomes than individuals without IDD.
- [Medicaid adult dental benefits](#) should provide coverage for comprehensive care for adults with IDD consistently across all states.
- People with IDD and other cognitive disabilities are often [underidentified or inconsistently captured](#) in national data systems; some estimate that 13%–23% of individuals with IDD are not included in federal surveys. Therefore, reports of negative oral health outcomes are likely underrepresented in current data sources. Improving disability identification in federal surveys and programs is essential for better policy and accountability in oral health care for those in this population.

## Bottom Line

National survey and claims data consistently show that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities face greater barriers to dental care and have worse oral health outcomes than those without disabilities. These inequities contribute to preventable pain, emergency department use, and higher health care costs, underscoring the need for a multifaceted approach to improve oral health for this population.

<sup>3</sup> Analysis of 2025 State of Oral Health Equity in America survey data by CareQuest Institute for Oral Health; cognitive disability designation based on self-report.

#### Suggested Citation:

CareQuest Institute for Oral Health. *Oral Health in People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD): What National Data Shows—and Why Action Matters*. Boston, MA: May 2026.

© 2026 CareQuest Institute for Oral Health, Inc.®