

State of Oral Health in America

Key Findings from 2026

Findings from the 2026 CareQuest Institute State of Oral Health in America survey show that millions of US adults remain without dental coverage, face barriers to care, and experience worse oral health outcomes than their overall health would suggest. Access to dental care continues to lag behind medical care, particularly for people who have lower incomes, who lack dental insurance, or who live in rural areas. Together, these results point to systemic gaps that leave many without timely and affordable oral health services.

Key Facts

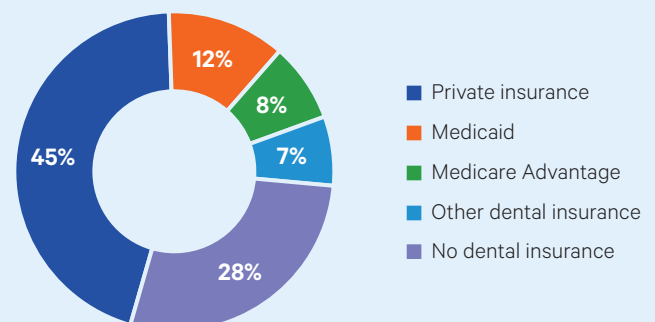
- In 2026, 28% of adults — the equivalent of 76 million adults living in America — are without any form of dental coverage. This is nearly three times the percentage of adults without medical insurance (10%, or 27 million adults).
- In 2026, 68% of adults — about 183 million adults — report having had a dental visit within the past year, compared with 82% of adults — or 221 million adults — who visited a physician during the same period.
- 11 million adults (4%) report seeking dental care in emergency departments (EDs), 11 million (4%) report traveling outside the US for dental care, and 8 million (3%) report seeing a nondental provider for dental care.
- Nearly a quarter of US adults (24%, or 65 million adults) rate their oral health as fair or poor, compared with 18% (49 million adults) who rate their overall health as fair or poor.
- Nearly half of adults (45%, or 121 million adults) report having lost at least one tooth due to decay or gum disease.
- Older adults, adults with lower incomes, and adults in rural areas continue to have lower rates of dental insurance, less access to dental care, and worse oral health outcomes.

Gaps in Dental Insurance Persist

Medicare does not cover most dental services. Medicaid coverage for adult dental care varies by state. Not all employers offer dental benefits. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) covers dental services for only a very small subset of veterans. Because of these inconsistencies, there are significant gaps in dental insurance coverage for adults in the United States.

More than one quarter (28%) of US adults — or 76 million — do not have dental insurance in 2026, which is nearly 3 times the percentage who lack medical insurance (10%, or 27 million). Nearly three quarters (72%) of adults have some type of dental insurance. About half of adults (45%) are covered through private dental insurance, while 28% have no dental coverage, 8% are covered through Medicare Advantage, 12% through Medicaid, and 7% through other forms of dental insurance. Overall, more adults report having medical insurance (90%) than dental insurance (72%).

Dental Insurance Coverage Reported by US Adults



Older adults report having dental insurance in the lowest numbers, despite having high rates of medical insurance.

Among adults aged 60 and older, 66% have dental insurance — a lower percentage than younger age groups and a sharp drop from the 77% of adults aged 45–59 with coverage. At the same time, adults 60 and older have the highest rate of medical insurance coverage of any age group (97%).

Rates of Having Dental Insurance Reported by US Adults



Age 60 and older **66%**

Age 45–59 **77%**

Dental Insurance Rates by Annual Household Income



Earning \$100,000 or more **83%**

Earning \$30,000 or less **60%**

Adults with lower incomes also report the lowest percentage of having dental insurance.

While 83% of adults earning \$100,000 or more annually report having dental insurance (and 96% have medical insurance), coverage drops significantly among those earning \$30,000 or less annually, with only 60% having dental insurance and 83% having medical insurance.

Fewer rural adults report having dental insurance.

Adults living in metropolitan areas have dental insurance (73%) and medical insurance (91%) in higher numbers than those living in nonmetropolitan areas (where 66% have dental and 89% have medical insurance).

Insurance Rates by Residential Location



Metropolitan — dental **73%**

Metropolitan — medical **91%**

Non-metropolitan — dental **66%**

Non-metropolitan — medical **89%**

US Adults Rating Their Oral Health as Fair or Poor



34% Without dental insurance

20% With dental insurance

Uninsured adults report poor oral health more often.

Adults without dental insurance rate their oral health as fair or poor (34%) in larger percentages than those with dental insurance (20%), including those with government-sponsored dental plans.

Lack of Access to Oral Health Care Persists

Gaps in dental coverage, along with other barriers, leave dental care out of reach for many Americans. As a result, some go more than a year without seeing a dentist, while others seek treatment in EDs. Access to dental care continues to lag behind access to medical care for US adults.

More adults receive medical than dental care.

In 2026, 68% of adults report visiting a dentist in the past year, compared with 82% who report seeing a physician. While 6% of adults report a dental visit but no medical visit, 21% report a medical visit but no dental visit.

Care Visits in the Last Year Reported by US Adults



Dental **68%**

Medical **82%**

Dental Visits in the Last Year by Age



Age 60 and older **77%**

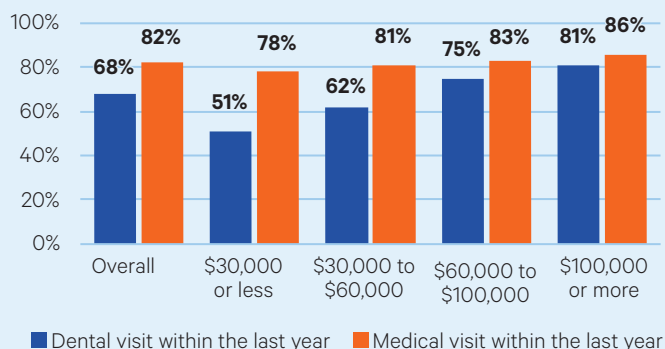
Age 18–29 **61%**

Younger adults report dental visits in the lowest numbers.

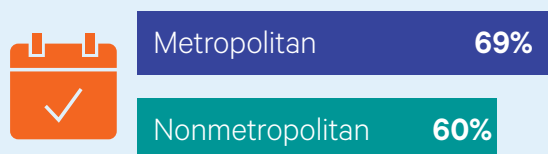
Only 61% of adults aged 18–29 report having a dental visit in the past year, compared with 77% of adults aged 60 and older.

Adults with lower incomes also have less access to dental care. Among adults earning \$100,000 or more annually, 81% report a dental visit and 86% a medical visit in the past year. For those earning \$30,000 or less annually, the rates drop to 51% for dental visits and 78% for medical visits.

Dental and Medical Visits in the Last Year by Annual Household Income



Dental Visits in the Last Year by Residential Location

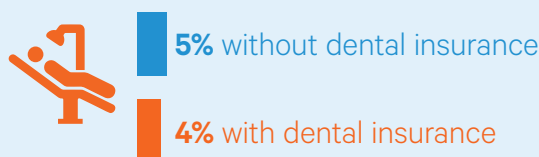


Rural adults report less frequent dental visits.

Adults living in metropolitan areas report a dental visit in the past year (69%) in higher numbers than those in nonmetropolitan areas (60%). Tooth loss also varies: 44% of adults in metropolitan areas have lost at least one tooth due to decay or gum disease, compared with 52% in nonmetropolitan areas.

Lack of access to dental care leads many to turn elsewhere for care. Four percent of adults (11 million) report seeking dental care in an ED in the past year for oral pain or discomfort. Adults without dental insurance report seeking dental care in EDs more often than others: 5% of adults without dental insurance report seeking dental care in an ED, slightly more than the rate of adults with private dental insurance (4%). ED [treatment for dental pain is costly](#) and [does not address the underlying problems](#), such as dental caries (decay).

ED Visits for Dental Care by Dental Insurance Status

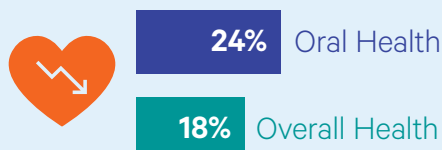


Income, Location, and Insurance Status Are Linked with Poor Oral Health

While oral disease is largely preventable, millions of Americans suffer from poor oral health. Adults consistently rate their oral health as worse than their overall health. Those with Medicare Advantage, Medicaid, or no dental insurance are more affected by oral disease — particularly in the form of missing teeth — than those with private or other types of dental insurance.

Nearly a quarter of American adults rate their oral health as fair or poor (24%), worse than they rate their overall health (18%). Nearly half of adults (45%) report having had one or more teeth removed due to dental caries or periodontal (gum) disease.

US Adults Rating Their Health as Fair or Poor in the Last Year



Adults with lower incomes report worse oral health.

While 87% of adults with an annual household income of \$100,000 or more rate their oral health as excellent, very good, or good, only 63% of adults earning \$30,000 or less annually report the same. Tooth loss is also more common among adults with lower incomes: 58% of those earning under \$30,000 have lost at least one tooth, compared to 49% of those earning \$30,000–\$60,000, 42% of those earning \$60,000–\$100,000, and 33% of those earning \$100,000 or more.

US Adults Rating Their Oral Health as Excellent, Very Good, or Good by Annual Household Income



Earning \$100,000 or more **87%**

Earning \$30,000 or less **63%**

US Adults Rating Their Oral Health as Excellent, Very Good, or Good by Residential Location



Metropolitan **77%**

Nonmetropolitan **71%**

Rural adults report worse oral health. Adults living in metropolitan areas rate their oral health as excellent, very good, or good (77%) in larger percentages compared to those in nonmetropolitan areas (71%). More than half (52%) of adults living in nonmetropolitan areas report losing at least one permanent tooth due to dental disease (tooth decay or gum disease), compared to 44% of adults in metropolitan areas.

Lack of dental insurance is linked to poorer self-rated oral health.

While 81% of adults with dental insurance rate their oral health as excellent, very good, or good, only 66% of adults without dental insurance do so.

US Adults Rating Their Oral Health as Excellent, Very Good, or Good by Dental Insurance Status



With dental insurance **81%**

Without dental insurance **66%**

Oral health remains out of reach for far too many Americans, forcing some to resort to extreme measures to receive care.

In 2026, about 11 million adults report seeking dental care in EDs, 11 million report traveling outside the US for dental care, and 8 million report seeing a nondental provider for dental care — choices people make when dental care is no longer affordable and accessible.

Methodology

The State of Oral Health Equity in America (SOHEA) survey is a nationally representative survey of adults' attitudes, experiences, and behaviors related to oral health. The study was designed by CareQuest Institute for Oral Health, and data presented in this report were collected by NORC at the University of Chicago in January–February 2026 from adults aged 18 and older on the AmeriSpeak panel. The sample size was 11,375 and the margin of error was +/- 1.38%. Readers are advised that changes in SOHEA percentages from year to year may fall within this margin of error and may not represent absolute increases or decreases in estimates, but may be suggestive of trends to continue to monitor over time. Millions counts were estimated on the census count of the [US adult population in July 2025](#) (269,763,509). Percentages were converted to numbers of adults based on the current estimated population of adults over 18 in the US. Unless otherwise noted, all data presented in this report were collected in 2026.

Suggested Citation:

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