



# Addressing Health Disparities for Individuals with Disabilities: What Are Their Dental Care Needs?

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## Background

- Oral health is essential to overall health and well-being. A growing body of research documents a strong association between oral health and chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and stroke (CDC, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2008; IOM & NRC, 2011).
- Good oral health is critical to communication, self-esteem, and quality of life. Individuals with disabilities are at great risk for oral diseases, which can further compromise their general health (Armour et al., 2008; DHHS, 2003; Seiran, Sundaresan, & Mulligan, 2011).
- Although people with disabilities in Delaware encounter disparities in access to dental care and oral health compared to those without disabilities (Sparling et al., 2015), there is a lack of detailed information on the dental care needs of individuals with disabilities which is necessary to improve dental care access and oral health for Delawareans with disabilities.
- The Center for Disabilities Studies (CDS) at the University of Delaware assisted the Delaware Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Service with a grant proposal to the Health Resources and Services Administration in 2015.
  - With this three-year project that started on September 1, 2015, CDS aims to improve access to oral health services for Delawareans with disabilities through cultural competence trainings relative to disability for dentists and dental hygienists in Delaware.
  - The findings of a dental care survey and a dentist survey will guide the development of the trainings.

## Objectives

- Determine the dental care needs of people with disabilities in Delaware.

## Method

### Data Source

- A statewide dental care survey that was conducted between May and August 2016
  - Parents of individuals with disabilities
  - Adults with disabilities
    - Visual impairments
    - Hearing impairments
    - Mobility limitations
    - Mild intellectual and developmental disabilities

### Study Sample

- Parents of individuals ages 6 to 49 with disabilities (n=106)

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## Preliminary Findings

### Characteristics of the Participants

Characteristics of Participants	Frequency	Percent
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	10	90.2
Female	92	9.8
<b>Age</b>		
25-34	5	4.7
35-44	28	26.4
45-54	32	30.2
55-64	20	18.9
65 and over	21	19.8
<b>Race and Ethnicity</b>		
White, non-Hispanic	74	72.6
Black, non-Hispanic	14	13.7
Hispanic	9	8.8
Multiracial	5	4.9
<b>Household Income</b>		
Less than \$25,000	13	14.0
\$25,000 to less than \$35,000	5	5.4
\$35,000 to less than \$50,000	11	11.8
\$50,000 to less than \$75,000	24	25.8
\$75,000 or more	40	43.0

Characteristics of Children with Disabilities	Frequency	Percent
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	64	61.5
Female	40	38.5
<b>Age</b>		
6-17	53	51.0
18-24	18	17.3
25-34	23	22.1
35-44	8	7.7
45-49	2	1.9
<b>Residential Setting</b>		
Parent's home/apartment	93	88.6
Family's/Relative's home	3	2.9
Community-based group residence	9	8.6
<b>Disability Type*</b>		
Visual impairments	9	8.7
Hearing impairments	17	16.4
Physical disabilities	17	16.0
Cognitive limitations	82	78.9

\* Not mutually exclusive

### Usual Source of Dental Care (USDC)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Having a USDC	92	88.5
<b>Travel Time to a USDC</b>		
Up to 30 minutes	65	71.4
31 to 60 minutes	24	26.4
61 to 90 minutes	2	2.2
<b>Number of Dental Offices Visited Before the Current Dentist</b>		
None	27	29.7
One	25	27.5
Two to five	39	42.9
<b>Type of Facilities for Child's Dental Care</b>		
Hospital	4	4.4
Community health center	1	1.1
Private general practice	59	65.6
Private pediatric practice	26	28.9

### Contact Information

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## Preliminary Findings (cont.)

### Dental Services for Children with Disabilities

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Delayed Dental Care in the Past 12 Months	28	28.6
<b>Main Reasons for Delayed Dental Care*</b>		
Could not afford care	7	25.9
No appointments available	1	3.7
Did not know where to go to get care	5	18.5
Child's fear, apprehension, nervousness	3	11.1
Concern about child's difficulty controlling behavior	4	14.8
Need for anesthesia	7	25.9
Other	10	37.0
<b>Last Dental Visit</b>		
Within the past year	94	89.5
Within the past 2 years	8	7.6
Within the past 5 years	2	1.9
5 or more years ago	1	1.0
<b>Out-Of-Pocket Costs on Child's Dental Care in the Past 12 Months</b>		
Nothing (\$0)	39	37.5
Less than \$500	46	44.2
\$500 to less than \$2,000	16	15.4
\$2,000 to less than \$3,000	2	1.9
\$3,000 to less than \$5,000	1	1.0

\* Multiple Choices

## Next Steps

- Comprehensive examination of the oral health needs of Delawareans with disabilities and the current capacity and needs of dentists in Delaware
- Development of disability cultural competence trainings for dentists and dental hygienists in Delaware
- Advocacy for Medicaid dental coverage expansion for adults
- Improving oral health literacy of individuals with disabilities
- Enhancing home care and oral hygiene for people with disabilities

## References

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