

2012 Older Adult Oral Health Survey

Income and insurance are keys to good oral health, but out of reach for many Washington adults aged 55 years and older

About the Survey

This first-ever statewide telephone survey gathered self-reported oral health information from 4,400 people aged 55 and older. It establishes baseline data on older adult oral health, and is intended to aid private and public organizations in planning and measuring efforts to improve the oral health status of older adults.

The survey sample was selected targeting an equal representation of Washington's 11 Area Agencies on Aging, and were weighted to closely represent Washington State's population demographics.

The next survey will be conducted in 4-5 years. For more information, contact Karen Lewis, Senior Program Officer, Washington Dental Service Foundation, 206-528-7244.

In Washington, adults aged 55 years and older rank higher than the national average when it comes to dental insurance, however, too many older adults still can't afford oral health care and have not been to the dentist in 2 – 5 years.



1 in 5 adults 55+ currently have a dental issue that needs to be addressed within the next month

Over half of the needed work is for filling or replacing teeth



Nearly 24% of seniors with an annual income under \$25,000 have not seen a dentist in five years or more

Cost is cited as the main reason for not going to the dentist

Nearly 6 in 10 older adults have had at least one permanent tooth removed due to tooth decay, gum disease, or infection



50% of seniors aged 65-74 have dental insurance

However, coverage drops to 36% for people 75+



70% of adults 55+ saw a dentist or dental hygienist within the past year

People with dental insurance are significantly more likely to visit the dentist at least once a year (84%) compared to those without dental insurance (54%).

Overall oral health differs by region

- Cost of care is a primary barrier in Southeast, Olympic, Eastern, and Snohomish regions.
- The healthiest areas appear to be King, Northwest, Kitsap, and Mason.
- The least healthy areas being Olympic, Southeast, Eastern, and Central.

Oral Disease Prevention & Early Treatment Keeps People Healthy and Saves Money

Strategies to Improve the Oral Health of Older Adults in Washington

- Restore Medicaid dental benefits for all adults
- Expand dental care access to reach more low-income older adults
- Bolster dental providers' expertise in treating seniors with complex medical conditions
- Provide oral health screenings and referrals during medical care visits
- Increase the availability of affordable community-based dental hygiene services



Good oral health is critical to overall health

Untreated dental disease has been linked to other serious health conditions including heart disease, diabetes, and pneumonia.



When oral disease is addressed early, painful and costly procedures can be prevented

Today, dental pain is the #1 reason uninsured people seek ER care. But ER care usually just deals with pain and infection, instead of the underlying dental problem, so people frequently return several times – and leave still needing dental care. Over an 18-month period, 54,000 dental-related visits to ERs in Washington cost more than \$36 million.