

Data Brief

Oral Health in Appalachian Ohio—2012

Many people living in Ohio's 32 Appalachian counties continue to experience poor oral health and significant barriers to getting dental care. These problems are worse in the Appalachian region than in other areas of Ohio.

The Oral Health of Children in Appalachia

- Significant disparities remain between children in Appalachian Ohio and children elsewhere in the state in the percentage with a history of tooth decay, untreated cavities, early or urgent dental needs and reported toothaches.
- These disparities are worsening. For example, in 1998, children in Appalachia had a 38 percent higher rate of untreated cavities than children elsewhere in Ohio; in 2009-10, the disparity increased to about 59 percent higher.
- Dental care remains the single most common unmet health care need among children in the region.
- Overall, 12 percent or 48,000 children in Appalachia have never been to the dentist. In some counties, 1 in 5 children have never been to the dentist.
- 16 percent of children in Appalachia have no dental insurance, and 42 percent are covered by Medicaid.
- Fortunately, grant funding for school-based sealant programs in the Appalachian region by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) has resulted in a higher percentage of children having one or more dental sealants. However, participation in this program has begun to decline.



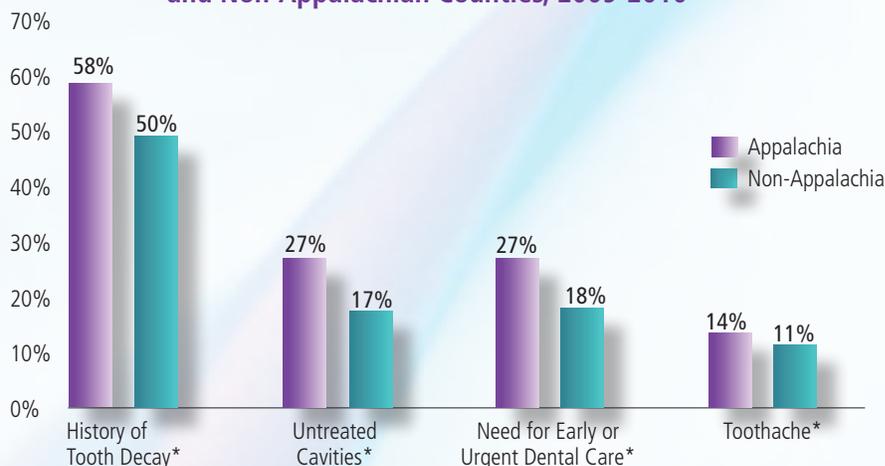
The Oral Health of Adults in Appalachia

Overall, adults 18 years of age and older in Appalachia have poorer oral health than adults in other areas of Ohio.

- Adults in Appalachia are 61 percent more likely to have lost all their permanent teeth due to tooth decay or gum disease, and 20 percent less likely to have visited a dentist in the past year.
- More than 18 percent of adults in Appalachia have not visited a dentist in five or more years.
- 47 percent of adults 18-64 years old in the region don't have **dental** insurance (more than 425,000 people), compared to 22 percent of adults in Appalachia who don't have **medical** insurance.
- About 60 percent of adults in Appalachia with an annual income at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level don't have dental insurance. Low-income adults who do have dental coverage rely on Medicaid rather than private dental insurance.

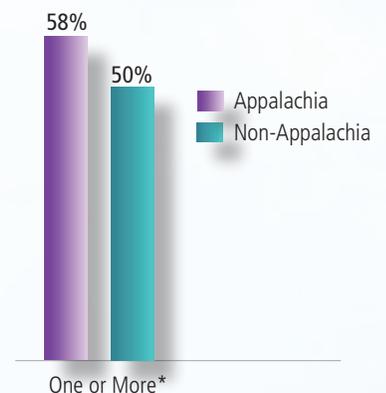


Comparison of Oral Health among Third Grade Children in Appalachian and Non-Appalachian Counties, 2009-2010



*Appalachian significantly different from Non-Appalachian counties at the p<.05 level

Dental Sealants





What are the Challenges in Getting Needed Dental Care?

- There is a shortage of dentists in the region, particularly specialists. Twenty-five of the 32 counties in the region are designated as federal dental Health Professional Shortage Areas.
- Thousands of residents in Appalachian Ohio live at least ten miles from the nearest dentist; the distance is 25 or more miles for specialty care, such as services by a pediatric dentist.
- There aren't enough dentists who take patients on Medicaid to provide care to the large number of people who are Medicaid-eligible.
- Voluntary programs to provide dental care at low- or no-cost have relatively few dentists enrolled, and the waiting list is long for people who've been approved to receive care.

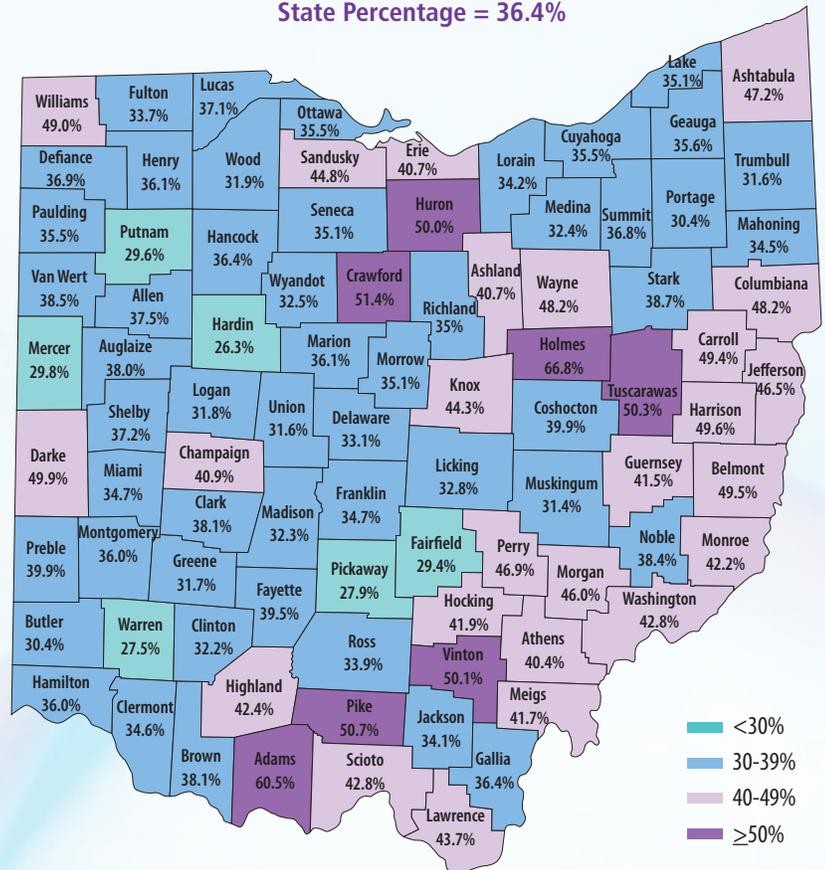


What Can Be Done?

In 2009, ODH convened a task force of key stakeholders to make recommendations on how to increase access to dental care for Ohio's most vulnerable residents. The following recommendations, based on those included in the task force strategic and implementation plans, address the unique oral health challenges in the Appalachian region:

- Increase the number of trained dentists and dental hygienists willing to work in Appalachia.
- Allocate resources to assure support for a sustainable dental safety net in Appalachia.
- Expand the use of alternative models of providing oral health care services (e.g., school-based/linked oral health services, mobile/portable dental systems) to increase access in underserved areas of Appalachia.
- Explore and test Medicaid fee differentials for primary care dentists practicing in Appalachia.
- Increase oral health literacy of the public, grassroots community groups, and policy makers and other key stakeholders to maximize participation in the ODH-funded School-based Sealant Program and other programs that deliver oral health services in Appalachia.
- Increase the number of non-dental primary care providers actively involved in improving the oral health of their patients.

Percentage of Adults in Ohio without Dental Insurance, Ohio Family Health Survey, 2008
State Percentage = 36.4%



Ohio

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