



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Report from Connecticut Oral Health Initiative Reveals Barriers to Achieving Good Oral Health, Top Cited Including Fear of Dental Office, Inaccessible Office Hours

COHI survey highlights racial & income disparities in oral health care, outlines several policy recommendations to improve access and break barriers

HARTFORD, CT, Nov. 21, 2024 – The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI), a nonprofit organization focused on strengthening and safeguarding access to quality, affordable, equitable oral health services for all Connecticut residents, released its newest report, [*Assessing Barriers to Achieving Good Oral Health for Connecticut Residents*](#), following a survey that revealed a multi-faceted view of barriers residents face when it comes to accessing oral health care.

Following studies conducted in [*2022 and 2023 analyzing the Medicaid Gap*](#), COHI administered a 2023 survey, funded by CareQuest Institute for Oral Health, to further examine barriers to dental treatment. The survey polled over 700 consumers in 91 Connecticut communities across several racial-ethnic groups and income levels to study the potential correlations of insurance type, ethnicity, and income with level of success accessing and maintaining good oral health.

Relatedly, barriers exist for healthcare providers, specifically challenges in participating in HUSKY Health and Medicaid networks. In a [*provider study COHI reported on*](#) earlier this year, providers cited low reimbursement rates and administrative burdens as some of the top barriers to providing equitable care.

In the [*Assessing Barriers to Achieving Good Oral Health for Connecticut Residents*](#) study, over 50% of respondents reported experiencing at least one barrier to accessing oral health care, citing – in order of prevalence – fear of the dental office, inconvenient dental office hours, and excessively long wait times for appointments as the most significant barriers. Nearly 56% of respondents reported that they consider their oral health to be “fair or poor.” Across all survey questions, participants enrolled in HUSKY Health or with no insurance were more likely to report barriers and/or rate their oral health as “fair or poor” than those with private insurance.

In the report, COHI puts forth several policy recommendations, including additional education, training, and provider standards for dental professionals to reduce fear of dental treatment and encourage preventative and restorative oral care; addressing practice operations to be more flexible with office hours; adjusting the Medicaid cap to encourage benefit usage; and examining social determinants of health and income disparities that contribute to lack of care.

"While the survey shows a large percentage of Connecticut residents face barriers to receiving quality and affordable oral health care, the solutions to overcoming these challenges are not a secret and already known to us," said Gary Turco, COHI Executive Director. "It will take systemic policy changes that invest in additional preventative and restorative services, changes in how oral health is delivered to patients, and more education to empower individuals to advocate for change and practice better home oral health hygiene habits."

The study goes into depth analyzing demographic differences across types of insurance and how type of insurance impacts utilization of services; ethnic/racial comparisons; and income differences by race/ethnicity and how it relates to oral health ratings, access to care, and reported barriers to achieving good oral health. The full report can be viewed at: ctoralhealth.org/assessing-barriers-report.

The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Inc. (COHI) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that advocates for oral health access, equity, and quality in Connecticut. COHI's vision is for all Connecticut residents to have equal opportunity to obtain the services needed to maintain good oral health. More information can be found at ctoralhealth.org.

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