

Lessons Learned from Free Dental Clinics

Voices from the Community



*Findings from Surveying Participants at
the CT Mission of Mercy Free Dental Clinic*

Background

COHI surveyed 79 participants at the Connecticut Mission of Mercy - a free dental clinic - to better understand participant reasons for attending the clinic.

Key Findings

- **Access to care is a major hurdle for oral health.** 75% of participants reported attending the clinic because dental care is unaffordable, and 32% reported urgent dental care needs. 16% said that they had trouble accessing care - such as lack of dentists in their area, transportation issues, and long wait times.
- **Many attendees lack insurance.** 50% of respondents had no dental insurance at all. 25% were covered through Medicaid or HUSKY, 17% reported having commercial or private insurance, and 8% reported having Medicare Advantage dental coverage.

Q4: What is your dental insurance?

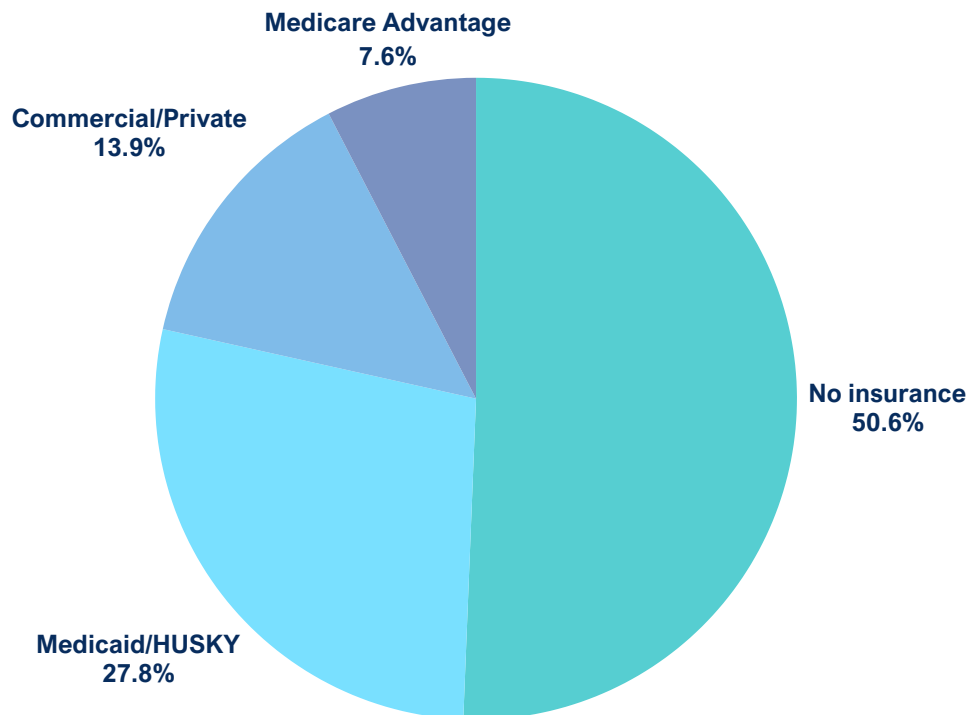


Figure 1: Breakdown of demographic information – highlights attendees lack of dental insurance

- **Comfort and trust significantly impact oral healthcare.** This question was included because COHI's previous report, *Assessing Barriers to Achieving Good Oral Health for Connecticut Residents*, identified fear of the dentist as the most frequently reported barrier to care. In this follow-up survey, when participants were asked what would help them feel more comfortable receiving dental care, 59% said they wanted friendlier, nonjudgmental staff. About 52% wanted clearer explanations of procedures, and 50% said better pain control would improve their experience.

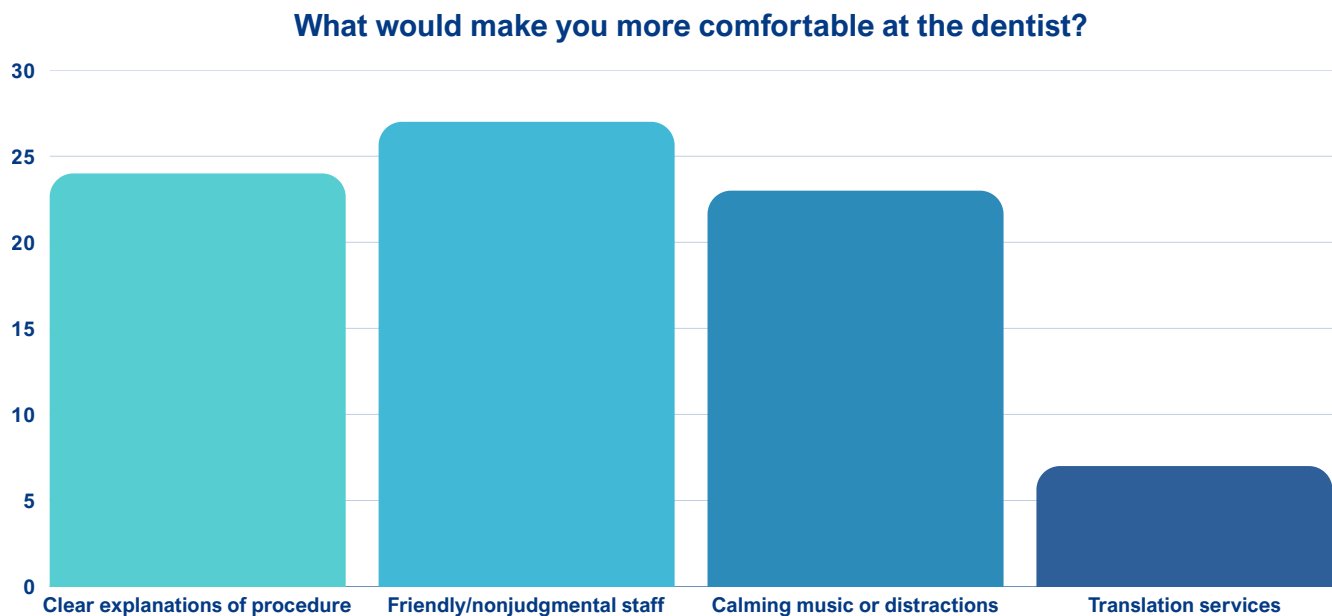


Figure 2: Breakdown of comfort factors for dental visits – most respondents want friendly, nonjudgmental staff.

- **There is strong interest in advocacy.** A large majority (80%) said they would be interested in advocating for improved access to oral health care in Connecticut, showing that many community members are eager to engage in solutions beyond their own needs.

Implications

These findings suggest critical barriers including inadequate insurance coverage and psychological barriers to care. The high interest in advocacy (80%) presents significant opportunity for community-engaged, grassroots systems change. COHI will leverage these insights to continue fighting for policy changes that benefit Connecticut residents' oral health.