



## \*\*\*Press Release\*\*\*

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### **The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative Releases New Report that Reveals Gaps in Access and Quality Care for Adults who have Dental Insurance through Medicaid**

*Report identifies reasons why more than half of Connecticut's 500k+ adult enrollees of Medicaid may not be utilizing any of their dental benefits in a given year, the barriers to access and quality care for those receiving services, and policy and practice recommendations for improvements.*

Hartford, CT - The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative Inc. (COHI), a nonprofit focused on oral health access, equity, and quality for all Connecticut residents, announced the release of its newest report, *A Medicaid Gap Analysis of Oral Health Care for Adults in Connecticut*. The report can be found at: <https://www.ctoralhealth.org/medicaid-gap-analysis-report-2022>.

This report is based on a study conducted from 2021 to 2022 that investigated the potential barriers causing gaps in oral health access and quality care for adults with dental insurance through Medicaid. The study focused on several key areas, including historical Medicaid service utilization data, the impact of Connecticut's \$1,000 annual maximum oral health benefits cap initiated in 2018, a geographical study to identify gaps in provider networks across the state, and an understanding of the experiences of providers and enrollees through in-depth interviews.

The findings revealed that over 500,000 adults in Connecticut are enrolled in Medicaid, yet more than half may not be utilizing any of their dental benefits in a given year. Even those adults utilizing services experienced numerous barriers to access and quality care. Some of those include an inadequate active Medicaid provider network in some regions of the state, difficulties in making dental appointments, a lack of trust in providers, possible discrimination against



enrollees, racial and ethnic inequities in quality of care, denials of covered benefits, the inability to obtain medically necessary uncovered benefits, and enrollees' limited knowledge of Medicaid dental benefits.

“Despite Connecticut’s attention on Medicaid to support oral health, the fact that more than half of all eligible people enrolled in Medicaid do not receive regular annual dental care shows that large-scale inequities remain in the dental treatment,” said COHI Board Member and Senior Scientist at the Institute for Community Research Dr. Jean Schensul. “There is no single answer to this problem – it is systemic and deserves immediate attention.”

Changes in policy and front-line care are needed to reduce these gaps. The report identifies several potential solutions for achieving better outcomes and suggests additional areas for further research. Some of the policy recommendations include: updating enrollee search tools on the Medicaid provider network, providing accessibility, better communications with patients, expanding Medicaid coverage for essential services such as periodontal treatment, exempting specific vital service categories from the annual maximum benefit cap, and investing in expanded educational outreach to improve participant understanding and use of their Medicaid benefits and their oral health literacy.

This research was funded by the CareQuest Institute for Oral Health and the Connecticut Health Foundation. Numerous community and advocacy groups from around the state assisted in organizing focused group discussions and individual in-depth interviews to learn about the experience of enrollees and providers with Connecticut’s oral health Medicaid system.

“The huge number of low-income adults who appear not to be accessing oral health care is just eye-popping,” said COHI Interim Executive Director Steve Eppler-Epstein. “Connecticut’s policy-makers and provider networks have done a lot over the years to improve oral health care in our state, but we have the opportunity to do a much better job addressing the needs and barriers faced by low-income and historically-marginalized communities.”

About COHI: Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Inc. (COHI). COHI is a 501c3 nonprofit that advocates for oral health access, equity, and quality in Connecticut. Our vision is that one day all Connecticut residents will have equal opportunity to obtain the services needed to maintain good oral health. More information can be found at: <https://www.ctoralhealth.org>.

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