
The Oral Health of Older Adults

Facts and Statistics

The Seniors Population is Growing

- Since 1980 the population of seniors in the United States has grown by almost 50 percent, from 25 million to 37 million in 2006.ⁱ
- By 2030 seniors will represent nearly 20% of Washington's population; currently seniors represent about 12%.ⁱⁱ

Too Many Older Adults Have Oral Disease

- More than 38% of all adults in the state have had teeth removed due to tooth decay or gum disease and 20% have lost all of their teeth.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Nearly one-fifth of older adults – estimated to be 150,000 people in Washington – have untreated dental cavities.^{iv}
- Twenty-five percent of adults 65 to 74 nationwide have severe periodontal (gum) disease.^v

Oral Disease is Linked to Serious Health Problems

- Gum disease has been linked to health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and pneumonia.^{vi}
- Research has shown a two-way relationship between diabetes and gum disease. Poor gum health makes it harder to control blood sugar and poorly controlled blood sugar makes people more likely to have gum disease.^{vii}

Few Seniors Have a Dental Benefit after Retirement

- The older a person becomes the less likely they are to have dental insurance: 62% of people aged 51-64 have dental insurance compared with 37% for ages 65-74 and 26% for the 75 and older age group.^{viii}
- The poorest older adults are more likely to have dental insurance than those with low incomes (due to Medicaid benefits).

Sources

ⁱ The Retirement Research Foundation, <http://www.rrf.org/presidentsMessage.htm>.

ⁱⁱ OFM, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ Washington State Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics (2001). *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2001 Data Tables*. Available at http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehsphl/chs/chs-data/brfss/BRFSS_2001_Tables.htm#Overall

^{iv} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (December 19, 2003). Public Health and Aging: Retention of Natural Teeth Among Older Adults—United States, 2002. *MMWR Weekly*. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5250a3.htm>

^v U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000). *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General* (Pub No. 00-4714). Rockville, MD. USDHHS, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. Available at <http://silk.nih.gov/public/hcklocv.@www.surgeon.fullrpt.pdf>

^{vi} *Journal of the American Dental Association*: 137(10), Supplement 2.

^{vii} Mealey, Brian. Periodontal Disease and Diabetes: A Two-Way Street. *Journal of the American Dental Association* 2006; 137: 26S-31S.

^{viii} Manski, Richard, et. al. Dental Care Coverage and Retirement. *Journal of Public Health Dentistry*, 2009; early view.