



Oral Health in America

Advances and Challenges

A Report from the National Institutes of Health

Key Summary of Full Report

- Good oral health is important for the overall health and well-being of individuals of all ages, their families, communities, and the nation.
- Through research and policy changes over the past 20 years, we have made substantial advances in the understanding and treatment of oral diseases and conditions, yet many people of all ages and demographic backgrounds still have chronic oral health problems and lack access to care.
- Healthy behaviors can improve and maintain individuals' oral health; these behaviors are shaped by social and economic conditions in which people are born, grow, work, and live.
- Oral and medical conditions often share common risk factors, and just as medical conditions and their treatments can influence oral health, so can oral conditions and their treatments affect other health issues.
- Substance misuse and mental health conditions negatively affect the oral health of many, and oral health providers are an integral part of the interprofessional team caring for these individuals. Professional schools have been challenged in preparing dental providers with the knowledge and skills needed for these new roles.
- Oral health services are evolving rapidly towards interprofessional models of delivery that integrate services across the health professions and expand access to care through new practice settings and new professional roles.
- The COVID-19 public health crisis has challenged the nation's health care system, including oral health care providers as never before, and with those challenges came new ways of ensuring safety during provision of dental care, of treating disease, and recognizing that oral health cannot be separated from overall health.

Call to Action

- To significantly improve the nation's oral health, policy changes are needed to reduce or eliminate social, economic, and other systemic inequities that affect oral health behaviors and access to care.
- To improve oral health for more people, dental and other health care professionals must work together to provide integrated oral, medical, and behavioral health care in schools, community health centers, nursing homes, and medical care settings, as well as dental clinics.
- To strengthen the oral health workforce, we need to diversify the composition of the nation's oral health professionals, address the costs of educating and training the next generation, and ensure a strong research enterprise dedicated to improving oral health.

