# Western North Carolina Oral Health Safety Net Review

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access dentalcare

## Background:

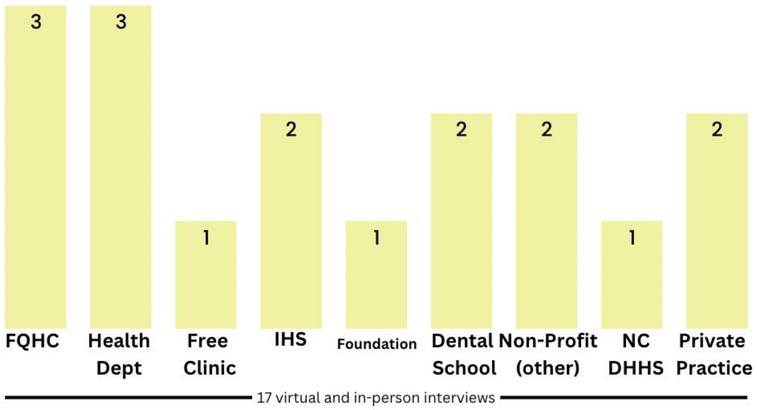
- Growing numbers of patients are utilizing community health centers for dental services
- In 2023, NC expanded Medicaid. Today, over 600,000 new beneficiaries have enrolled[1]
- NC ranks 37th for dentist Medicaid participation[2]

## Purpose:

To evaluate oral health safety net programs' existing challenges, funding models, sustainability, and ability to meet community needs

## Methods:

Data was collected through qualitative interviews of 17 oral health collaborators involved in efforts to improve equitable access to oral health services in NC




References:
1. *NC Medicaid, Division of Health Benefits*. NC Medicaid. (2024). https://medicaid.ncdhhs.gov/reports/medicaid-expansion-dashboard
2. Analysis of the HPI's Office Database maintained by the American Dental Association (2019) and Insure Kids Now data (2019).

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Nearly all oral health collaborators highlighted similar challenges in safety net dentistry, including **inadequate and unsustainable funding** models, **workforce shortages,** and a growing **gap between service capacity and community needs.**

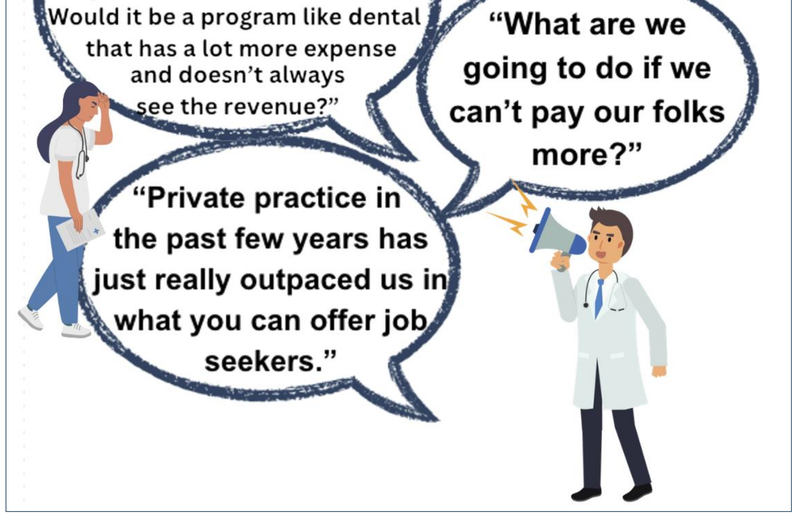
## Discussion:

- We must listen to the voices of those from within this system and heed their call for help
- Current funding streams are precarious and cannot adequately sustain and grow dental safety net programs
- Workforce shortages are crippling

## Results:

**Key findings:**

- Workforce recruitment and retainment difficulty
- Disconnection between programs, practices, and services
- Reliance on insufficient and unsustainable funding sources




## Recommendations:

- Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates + provide payment for care coordination
- Implement payment reform pilot programs for safety net dental service delivery
- Increase integration of dental services into primary care delivery, promote data sharing
- Increase the quantity and distribution of hygiene and DA training programs
- Expand scholarship opportunities
- Increase the attraction to safety net careers through innovative and hybrid positions combining clinical care, advocacy, and faculty roles with partnered hygiene / assisting programs