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Pediatric Patients Accessibility to Oral Health Care in New York

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Introduction

Pediatric oral health is essential for overall well-being, yet disparities in access to dental care persist across New York State. This study investigates the factors contributing to reduced utilization of pediatric dental services, particularly in rural areas, to better understand and address the challenges faced by underserved communities.

Purpose

The purpose of this research project is to explore the correlation between reduced utilization of dental services among children and teens in rural areas compared to their urban and suburban counterparts in New York State. The study seeks to identify barriers to accessing pediatric dental care, including the availability of dentists by county, the number of providers accepting Medicaid insurance, and transportation challenges influencing oral health care accessibility for young populations across the state.

Methods

- This study employed a mixed-methods approach to assess pediatric dental care accessibility across New York State. Quantitative data was collected from the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) to analyze the distribution of dentists per county, including those accepting Medicaid, and to gather statistics on children's dental service utilization.
- Additionally, records from the New York State Medicaid Program were obtained to evaluate service utilization patterns among Medicaid-enrolled children, and information from the Center for Health Workforce Studies (CHWS) and the Community Healthcare Network was collected to focus on the availability of dentists and their practice locations.
- For data analysis, statistical methods were used to perform comparative analyses, identifying correlations between geographic location (rural vs. urban/suburban) and dental service utilization rates among children and teens. Thematic analysis was conducted to extract common themes regarding barriers to accessing care.

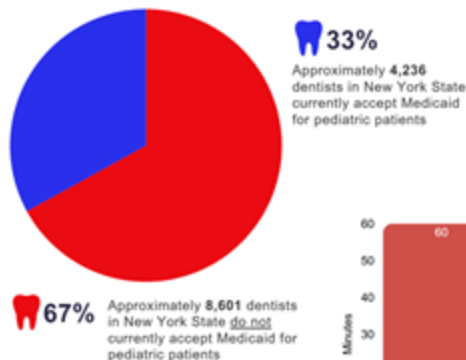
References:



Results

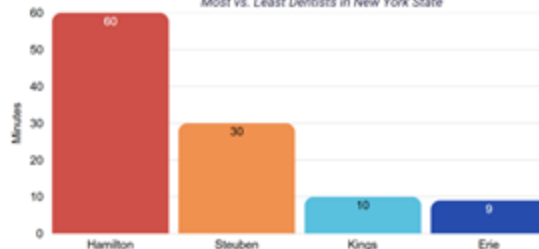
NY Clinicians Accepting Medicaid

Total Number of Dentists in New York: 12,837



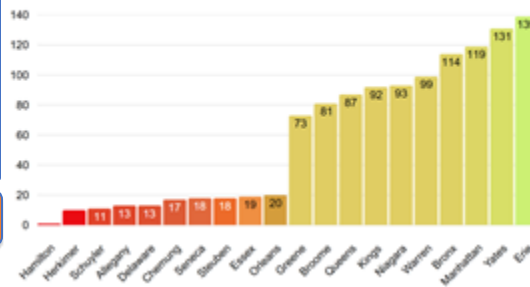
Travel Time to the Family Dentist - Urban vs. Rural

Based on Sampling of Counties with the Most vs. Least Dentists in New York State



Number of Dentists per 100,000 Population

Comparison of Counties with Most vs. Least Dentists in New York State



Results

- Two thirds of dentists in NY State do not take Medicaid for dental services.
- In 2023, 92% of rural counties in New York State were designated as health professional shortage areas. Most private dentists accepting Medicaid are located in urban areas of New York State.
- From data gathered, Hamilton county has extremely low access to care with 0 dentist practicing in the entire county, with a population of 5,082 individuals. In addition, there are only two pediatric dentists outside of Hamilton county for a 50 mile radius.
- Erie county has the highest population of dentists per 100,000 people at a rate of 139 per 100,000.
- Travel times for dental services varied amongst counties with the highest travel time being on average 60 minutes if you lived in Hamilton county compared to only 9 minutes if you lived in Erie county.
- Hamilton county has no forms of public transit with Steuben county providing limited transit with only a maximum of 10 bus rides per day. Poor access to public transit reduces access to care due to individuals that may have disabilities or do not have a vehicle, which leaves them without proper modes of transportation.

Discussion

- From analyzing the statistical data, we identified key factors contributing to the reduced utilization of dental services among rural children and teens in New York State, including a shortage of dentists, limited acceptance of Medicaid, and significant transportation challenges.
- These findings underscore the necessity for targeted interventions to improve access to pediatric dental care in underserved areas.
- Ways to alleviate oral health disparities amongst rural communities include, offering loan forgiveness at the federal and state levels for individuals who work in rural areas only (separate from NHSC), providing better access to public transit and expanding Medicaid fees throughout the state of NY.
- This data will be presented to the New York State Board of Health to inform policy decisions aimed at improving dental services and oral health outcomes for rural and low-income residents across the state.