



Tooth decay

Low-income individuals in North Dakota report that oral health is a major unmet need. In a North Dakota Community Action Agency statewide needs assessment study, 40 percent of respondents ranked dental health care among the top three unmet needs, along with food and utilities.

- Although preventable, tooth decay is a chronic disease affecting all age groups. Left untreated, tooth decay can cause pain and tooth loss.
- Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease of childhood and can be associated with difficulty in eating, sleeping, learning and proper nutrition.
- A 2004-2005 North Dakota study of third-grade children found that:
 - More than half (56 percent) of the children had cavities and/or fillings.
 - Seventeen percent of the children had untreated tooth decay.
- Among adults, untreated decay and tooth loss can lead to loss of a person's ability to chew and speak and can interfere with social functioning, self-esteem and employability.



Dental sealants

- Dental sealants are a thin plastic coating placed on the pits and fissures of the chewing surfaces of teeth. Sealants prevent tooth decay by creating a barrier between the teeth and decay-causing bacteria.
- Sealants also stop cavities from growing and can prevent the need for expensive fillings. Sealants are 100 percent effective if they are fully retained on the tooth.



No sealant

Sealant

Dental sealants are effective in the primary prevention of tooth decay.

- A 2004-2005 survey of North Dakota third-graders found that almost half (47 percent) of the children did not have dental sealants.
- North Dakota currently does not have any school-based dental sealant programs to reach high-risk children.

The number of children in North Dakota with untreated tooth decay and a lack of dental sealants is unevenly distributed, with greater unmet needs in the state's minority populations.

Access to dental care

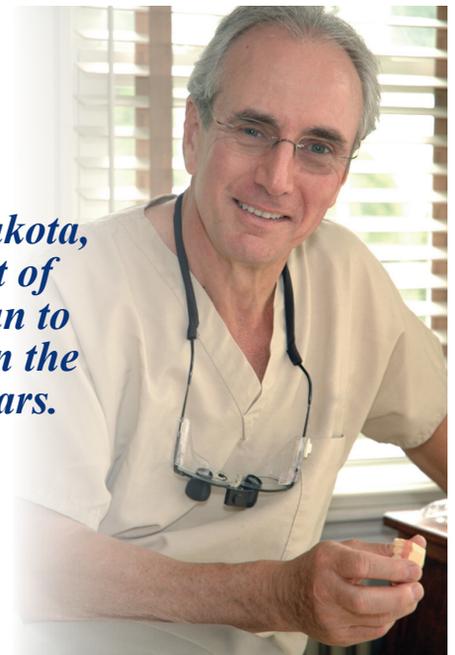
- Data from the 2006 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) showed that 30 percent of adults had not visited a dentist or dental clinic within the past year.
- In 2007, the North Dakota Medicaid Program reported that only 28 percent of Medicaid-eligible adults and only 25 percent of Medicaid-eligible children had a dental visit during the past year.
- Adults with lower income and lower educational levels and those belonging to racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to have had a dental visit in the past year.
- The 2006 BRFSS showed that 38 percent of individuals with a disability indicated they had not had a dental visit within the last year, compared to 28 percent of those with no disability.



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Lack of dental work force

- A real concern in North Dakota is the chronic shortage of dental professionals in rural areas. Seventeen of the state's 53 counties have no dentists, 11 counties have only one dentist, and 10 counties have only two dentists.
- With the lack of access to rural dental care, rural residents (especially the elderly) may not be willing or able to travel to acquire dental care.
- The average age of North Dakota dentists is 51.
- According to information from the University of North Dakota (UND) School of Medicine and Health Sciences, 51 percent of dentists plan to retire within the next 15 years.
- The dental loan repayment plan is a state-financed and administered program designed to attract dentists to North Dakota to practice in areas of need.
- Four dental safety-net clinics provide services to the underserved in the state. They are located in Bismarck, Fargo (2) and Grand Forks.



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NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT of HEALTH