



The 2025 State of America's Oral Health and Wellness Report

Commissioned by Delta Dental Plans Association





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Foreword from James W. Hutchison

President & CEO, Delta Dental Plans Association

At Delta Dental, we understand that oral health is a cornerstone of overall wellness, and it is promising to see that most adults recognize this critical connection as underscored in this year's "State of America's Oral Health and Wellness Report." Now in its fifth year, the report commissioned by Delta Dental provides data and analysis regarding the oral and overall health behaviors of adults and children nationwide.

This year, the state of U.S. oral health is generally positive, but areas for improvement remain. Interestingly, while adults maintain near-universal awareness of the relationship between oral and overall health, we see a clear opportunity to foster more education on the link between poor oral health and specific medical conditions such as heart disease, respiratory illness, and high blood pressure. Ensuring that individuals fully appreciate how oral health affects systemic conditions is imperative for optimal overall health.

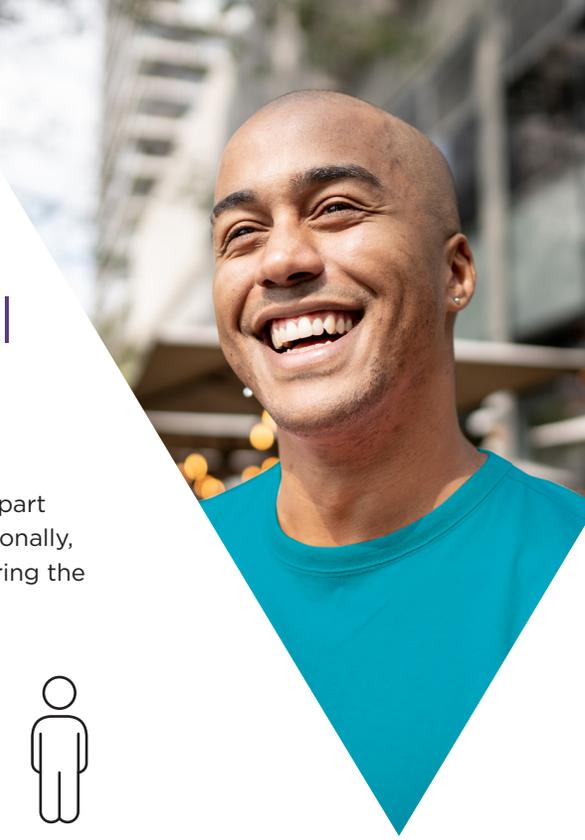
I am encouraged to see that a vast majority of adults with dental benefits continue to report tangible physical, mental, and financial health benefits. Notably, insured adult respondents report significant annual out-of-pocket savings, emphasizing the role of dental benefits in reducing financial barriers to essential care.

As the nation's leading dental benefits provider and oral health philanthropist, we are committed to ensuring continued dialogue and supporting access to care so that individuals of all ages prioritize and safeguard their oral health and broader well-being.

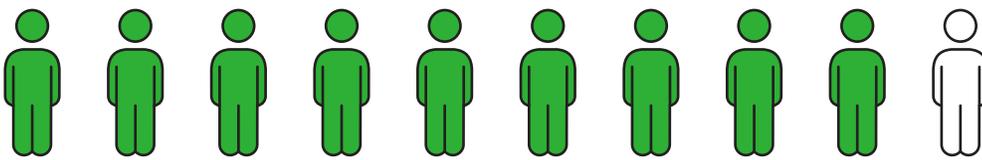
James W. Hutchison
President & CEO,
Delta Dental Plans Association



Adults maintain near-universal awareness of the relationship between oral health and overall well-being



In fact, more than 9 in 10 adults (91%) believe their oral health is an integral part of their overall health, indicating a holistic understanding of wellness. Additionally, nearly all parents (95%) feel similar about their child's oral health, underscoring the importance of good dental hygiene to help keep children healthy.



GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Adults who agree that oral health is closely connected to overall health

While the connection between oral and overall health is generally acknowledged across generations, Gen Z exhibits the lowest level of agreement, potentially due to experiencing fewer health issues overall.



Adults who rate aspects of their health as good or excellent

Further, a majority of adults (70%) believe that protecting their oral health is closely connected to their mental health. However, adults rate their oral health below their mental and physical health, showing room for improvement in this vital part of their overall wellness.



Interestingly, this year, adults have a reduced understanding of the direct correlation between oral health and specific health conditions such as:



heart disease
44% in 2025
(vs. 49% in 2024)



respiratory illness
31% in 2025
(vs. 35% in 2024)



high blood pressure
27% in 2025
(vs. 32% in 2024)



stroke
26% in 2025
(vs. 30% in 2024)

However, there is a broad understanding of the importance of proper dental hygiene for those who have weakened immune systems (i.e., immunocompromised) due to medical conditions. While more than half (56%) of adults believe that protecting oral health is important for immunocompromised individuals, those with chronic conditions are less likely to rate their oral health as good or excellent (31% vs. 44%) and face greater difficulty in accessing dental care (24% vs. 13%) compared to those without chronic conditions. Most commonly, nearly half (46%) of those with chronic conditions experience some level of financial concern that prevents them from seeking preventive dental care.



▶ SPOTLIGHT ON ◀ PREGNANCY AND ORAL HEALTH

Many adults understand that good oral health is an essential part of prenatal care, but there is an opportunity to further educate and raise awareness about its full impact on maternal and infant health.

Notably, half of women who are or have been pregnant see the strong value of oral health during prenatal care, acknowledging its role in their overall wellness.

50%
agree oral health is an important part of prenatal care.



In fact, more than 1 in 2 women who are or have been pregnant are likely to prioritize dental visits (54%), as they believe it is as important as scheduling their annual physical.



Specifically, a third (33%) of adults understand that pregnant individuals are at greater risk for periodontal (gum) disease.



In addition, over one in four adults (26%) recognize that periodontal disease may be associated with adverse pregnancy outcomes, including pre-term birth and low birth weight.



Oral health during pregnancy is a cornerstone of both maternal and infant well-being. The connection between a mother's oral health and her baby's development is profound. By prioritizing dental care, we can reduce the risks of complications such as pre-term birth and low birth weight, paving the way for a healthier start in life. Embracing comprehensive oral health care empowers mothers to protect their own health and that of their babies, safeguarding against systemic illnesses, fostering better quality of life, and promoting holistic health.



Amisha Singh, DDS, EdD
Dental Director,
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A message from Joseph Dill, DDS, MBA

Chief Dental Officer, Delta Dental Plans Association

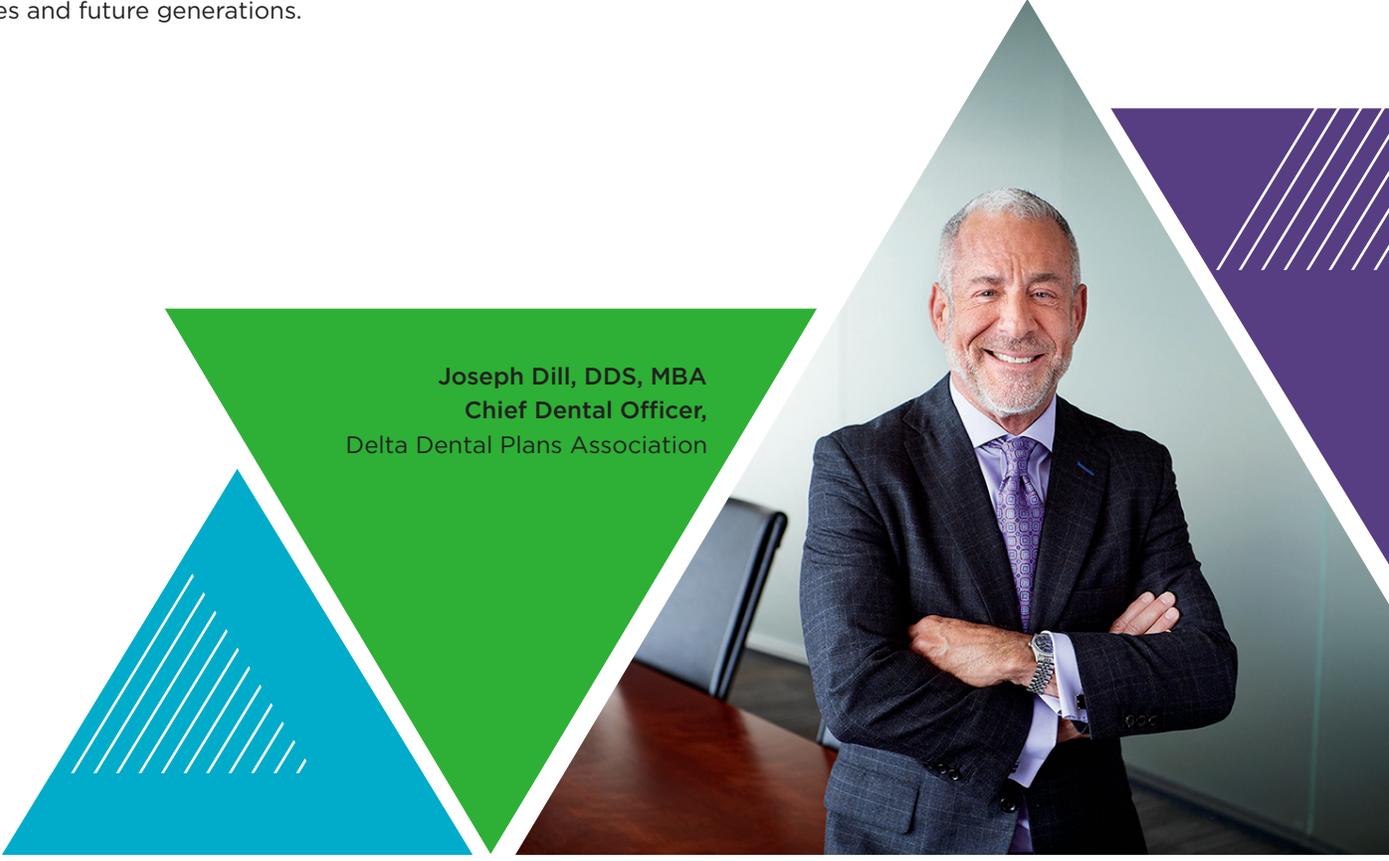
Maintaining good oral hygiene is essential to overall health, yet this year's report reveals that some fundamental habits, such as brushing twice daily and flossing, have declined over the past year. While adults generally understand the importance of proper oral health care, there is still room to strengthen these habits — particularly among parents who acknowledge the need to reinforce healthy routines with their children.

However, despite a slight decline in daily at-home habits, adults are increasingly motivated to visit the dentist for preventive checkups, and encouragingly, there is a significant decrease in unexpected visits over the prior year.

Many adults continue to prioritize twice annual cleanings, recognizing their critical role in maintaining long-term oral health. Regular checkups help prevent common issues such as cavities and gum disease and allow for early detection of potential health issues that can impact overall well-being.

That said, the report underscores how dental anxiety can preclude individuals from seeking essential dental care. As a dentist, I understand the importance of addressing this challenge, which requires a focus on patient-centered care and ongoing education to help adults and children feel more at ease in the dentist's chair.

By committing to both at-home oral health care and consistent visits to the dentist, we can collectively ensure healthier smiles and improved overall health for ourselves and future generations.



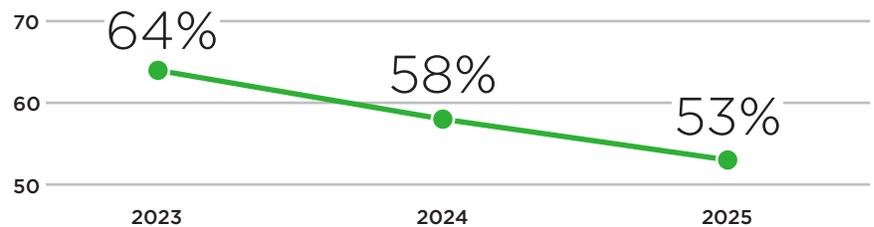
Joseph Dill, DDS, MBA
Chief Dental Officer,
Delta Dental Plans Association

Intentions for good oral hygiene remain strong, but some at-home behaviors are slipping

Most adults have a solid understanding of proper oral health habits; however, certain good behaviors have waned in recent years such as frequent flossing and rinsing with mouthwash.

Notably, since 2023, there has been an 11-point decline in adults who replace their toothbrush every 3 months as recommended.

Adults are less likely to replace their toothbrushes in the recommended timeframe

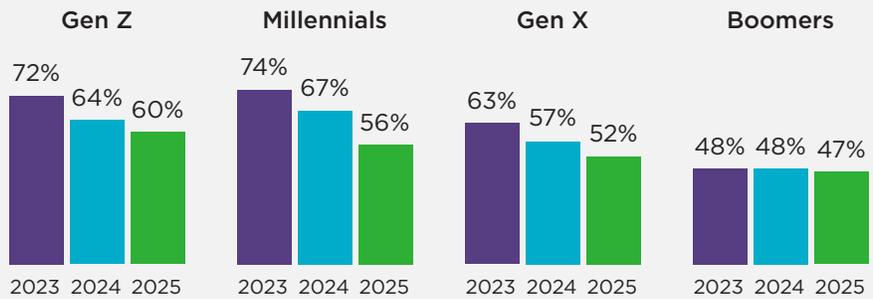




GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

While younger generations, such as Gen Z and Millennials, replace their toothbrushes more often than older generations, Millennials are replacing their toothbrushes less frequently compared to past years.

Percentage who replace their toothbrush at least every 3 months



Further, this trend has extended to at-home oral health care practices such as brushing, flossing, and rinsing. While most adults adhere to the recommended guidelines for these oral health practices, there has been a notable decline in the past year.



74%
brushing 2x per day
(vs. 79% in 2024)



71%
flossing 1x per day
(vs. 76% in 2024)



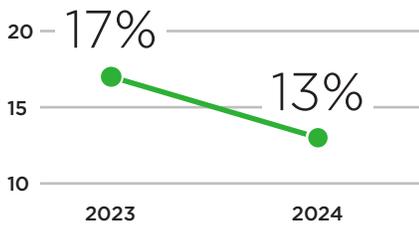
66%
using mouthwash 1x per day
(vs. 74% in 2024)

▶ SPOTLIGHT ON ◀ CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH

Despite generally good dental hygiene habits among children, parents feel there is room for improvement to strengthen their children's oral health.

In 2025, preventive care is still a high priority for parents. Encouragingly, almost all parents (95%) took their child to the dentist in the past year, most of the time (94%) for preventive visits.

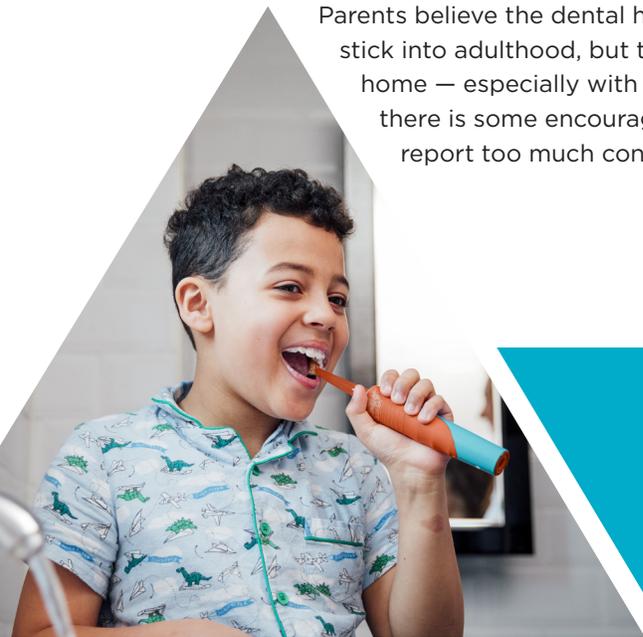
Notably, unexpected dental visits in children decreased in 2024.



About 1 in 10 parents are taking their child to the dentist for an unexpected reason, primarily related to cavities, crooked teeth, and halitosis (bad breath).

Moreover, children tend to mostly adhere to the recommended oral hygiene guidelines, but there has been a softening in the past year. On average, 2 in 3 kids brush their teeth twice per day (67% in 2025 vs. 72% in 2024) while about half floss (50% in 2025 vs. 50% in 2024) or use mouthwash once per day (46% in 2025 vs. 54% in 2024).

Parents believe the dental hygiene habits they teach will stick into adulthood, but they recognize challenges at home — especially with consistent flossing. However, there is some encouraging news — fewer parents report too much consumption of soda and sweets.



Parents report the following issues to be the biggest culprits in their child's oral health:



51%
not flossing enough
(vs. 46% in 2024)



47%
eating too many sweets
(vs. 49% in 2024)



45%
not brushing enough
(vs. 43% in 2024)



21%
too much juice
(vs. 20% in 2024)



17%
too much soda
(vs. 21% in 2024)

▶ SPOTLIGHT ON ◀ CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH

Further, two-thirds of parents admit to having difficulty getting their children to brush their teeth (67%), as kids find this habit burdensome, making it a challenge for parents to keep oral hygiene routines engaging and consistent. Creating routines for a child that incorporate aspects of play, such as setting a brushing timer based on a fun song, could help overcome these challenges.

Primary obstacles for proper brushing among children



Establishing good oral health habits early in childhood sets the foundation for a lifetime of healthy smiles. Educating children on a healthy diet, proper brushing, and flossing techniques can prevent cavities and gum disease, ensuring strong, healthy teeth as they grow. These habits play a key role in maintaining good overall health and well-being.

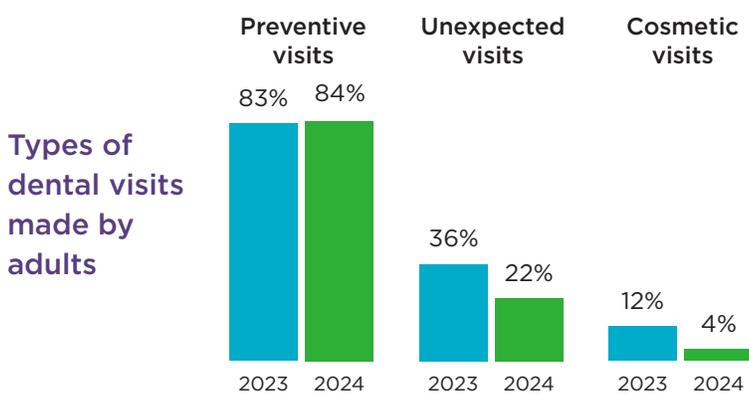


Nevin Mathai, DMD
Dental Director,
Delta Dental of Missouri

Preventive dental visits continue to be prioritized to avoid more serious long-term issues

Adults are increasingly motivated to seek preventive dental care because they recognize the link between good oral health and overall wellness. More than 6 in 10 adults (64%) schedule regular checkups to minimize the risk of future dental problems, a significantly larger group compared to last year (57%).

The frequency of preventive visits remained steady in 2024, and encouragingly, unexpected visits dropped significantly. Further, cosmetic care visits experienced a sharp decline and were largely driven by younger generations, potentially as individuals are being more mindful of spending.



Top motivators for making a preventive dental visit include:



54% taking advantage of dental insurance coverage (vs. 51% in 2024)



58% scheduling future checkups at the end of exam (vs. 47% in 2024)

Adults prioritize oral health for several reasons, including financial considerations and preventing more serious issues down the road.



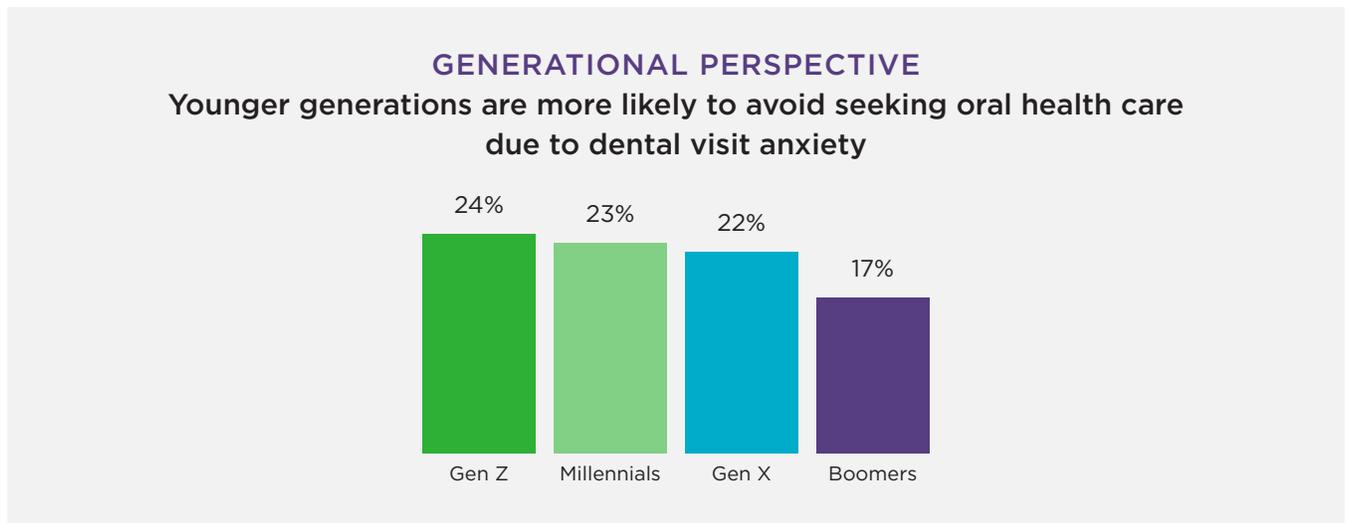
90% of adults agree that addressing oral health issues can save them money in the long term



87% of adults view dental appointments as important as their annual physical examination

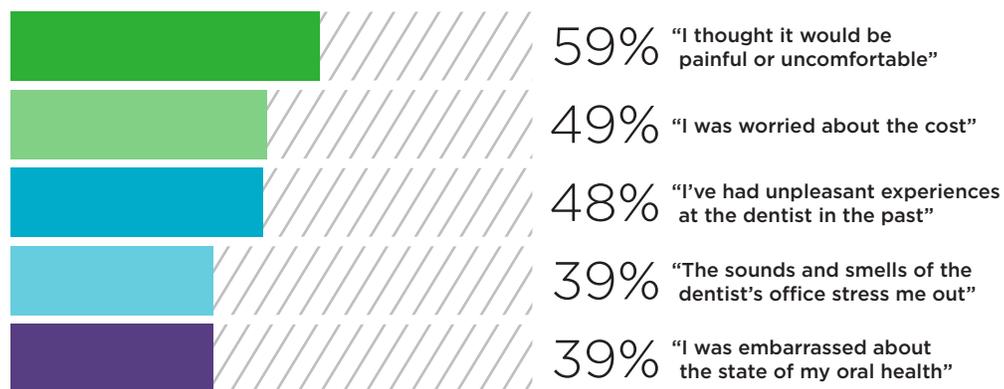
Anxiety surrounding dental visits can be a barrier for adults and children alike

Anxiety prevents a notable number of adults and children from receiving necessary dental care, both preventive and unexpected. More than 1 in 5 (21%) adults have avoided dental care due to anxiety, and 1 in 7 (14%) parents have skipped taking their children to the dentist for the same reason.

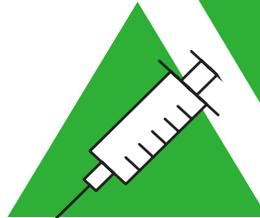
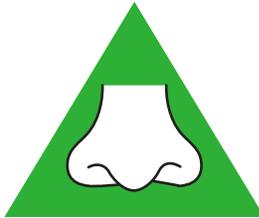


Those who feel anxious when visiting the dentist largely attribute this to fear of experiencing pain or discomfort, cost concerns, and previous unpleasant experiences.

Top reasons for feeling anxious at the dentist



Children also experience feelings of anxiety surrounding dental care, with more than 1 in 4 (26%) parents reporting that their child feels anxious about their cleanings and exams. This sentiment is especially true for children between the ages of 6 and 12 who are more likely to be anxious during preventive dental visits than younger children (31% vs. 17%).



Common reasons for children's dental anxiety include anticipating pain and discomfort or fear around different aspects of the dental office. Nearly 3 in 4 (72%) parents whose anxious child visited the dentist reported their child anticipated pain or discomfort, and dental office sights, sounds, and smells (41%), as well as fear of needles (37%), were key contributors.

Understanding and overcoming dental anxiety through patient education, compassionate care, and relaxation techniques can foster a more positive experience, encouraging regular visits and optimal oral health among younger patients.



Building on positive experiences is a good way to ease some potential concerns from parents and children. Having children start dental visits early — before their first birthday or within six months after their first tooth appears — with parents and taking the opportunity to highlight and reinforce oral hygiene is key. For those children that need intervention early in their dental visits, using descriptive, kid-friendly language of the feeling of the procedure and the tell-show-do technique is especially helpful.



Cindy McGregor, DDS
Vice President of Dental Services,
Delta Dental of Minnesota

Individuals with dental insurance report physical, mental, and financial health benefits



86%

of adults believe dental insurance is essential to protect oral and overall health (similar to 2024)

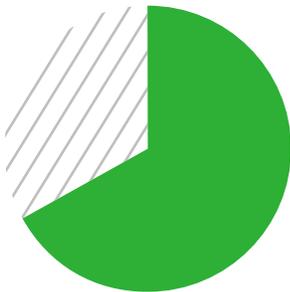


85%

of adults believe dental insurance encourages them to practice better oral health habits (similar to 2024)

Dental insurance also encourages individuals to pursue dental care throughout the year, as adults with coverage are significantly more likely to make a preventive visit to the dentist than those without.

Made a preventive visit to the dentist in 2024



67%
with dental insurance



28%
without dental insurance

Additionally, many adults recognize the positive effects of dental insurance on their mental state.



86%

of adults say that dental insurance saves them from having unnecessary worry about future dental emergencies.



85%

of adults say dental insurance gives them overall peace of mind.



These benefits likely encourage uninsured adults to enroll in a policy, as more than

1 in 4 (28%)

of those without coverage indicate that they are likely to enroll in the next year.



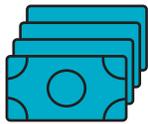
Dental coverage supports financial health with an overwhelming majority of adults (84%) believing that dental insurance helps save money in the long run.



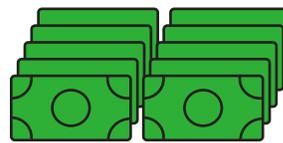
Many appreciate that dental insurance offers pre-negotiated discounts with their dentist (77%) and is worth the cost (79%). This is especially important as concern regarding unexpected costs is an increasing barrier to dental care, particularly for those without coverage.

In fact, insured adult respondents reported substantial estimated annual out-of-pocket savings in 2024 due to their dental plans compared to those without coverage.

Estimated median annual savings for those with dental benefits



\$400
for an individual



\$1,000
for a family
of four

In 2025, the state of U.S. oral health is generally positive, but areas for improvement remain. While the link between good oral health and physical and mental wellness is widely acknowledged, dental anxiety and dips in at-home dental care impact some households. Ensuring broader access to dental coverage can help more individuals maintain optimal oral health, as it plays a crucial role in fostering routine oral health care, making preventive dental visits more accessible, and reducing financial barriers to care.



About the research

Delta Dental Plans Association commissioned a third-party market research firm, Material Holdings, LLC (Material), to undertake research that formed the basis for this report. Material conducted its research between January 9 and January 23, 2025, using an email invitation and online surveys of two audiences recruited through an opt-in panel:

- 1,000 nationally representative U.S. adults ages 18+
- 1,000 parents of children ages 12 and under

Geographic distribution quotas were set to ensure a reliable and accurate representation of the U.S. population of adults and parents with children ages 12 and under. Research in this report has a margin of error of +/- 3%.

The generational categories referred to in this report are defined by the following:

- Gen Z: individuals born between 1997 and 2007
- Millennials: individuals born between 1981 and 1996
- Gen X: individuals born between 1965 and 1980
- Boomers: individuals born between 1946 and 1964

About Delta Dental Plans Association

Based in Chicago, Illinois, Delta Dental Plans Association is the not-for-profit national association of the 39 independent Delta Dental companies. Through these companies, Delta Dental is the nation's largest dental benefits provider and offers the country's largest dental network with approximately 152,000 participating dentists. Over the last decade, Delta Dental companies and their foundations invested nearly \$2 billion to improve the oral and overall health of our communities.





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