



## Oral Health America Dental Survey--Executive Summary

From April 29, 2009 through May 3, 2009, over 1,000 individuals were interviewed over the telephone on issues related to dental health and dental benefits. These individuals expressed a wide range of viewpoints as to the extent to which the economy has affected their pursuit of dental care for themselves, the importance of having dental coverage included as part of overall health care reform efforts getting underway in Washington, DC; and the extent to which coverage is important for the elderly and children.

According to the survey results, a vast majority of adults know that lack of proper dental care can lead to overall poor health. In addition, a majority of adults currently have a dentist and some form of dental benefit. A significant number of adults, however, currently report having an unmet dental need. Economic uncertainty seems to play some role in a significant number of instances where individuals are not actively seeking treatment for dental health conditions. Almost one out of every six people reported holding off going to the dentist because of uncertainty about their job and/or the economy. This is even more apparent among those with lower annual incomes; almost one-third of those with low incomes are holding off on seeing the dentist, even though their needs are great.

The desire to have some level of guaranteed dental coverage as part of any health care reform effort is clearly present in the U.S. population. Eight out of ten adults think that it's important that dental coverage is part of a health reform package (40% feel very strongly about this point). It is not surprising that an even larger number of individuals without current coverage feel similarly. Many even go as far as saying that, even if the government has to provide it, dental coverage should be extended to all uninsured Americans, especially children and the elderly.

## Detailed Findings and Demographic Differences

### Which of the following, if any, are true for you?

The majority of U.S. adults (64%) currently have a dentist and just over half (54%) have some form of dental benefit. Yet 6% of those who have some form of dental benefit say they have an unmet dental need and another 16% have held off going to the dentist because of uncertainty about their job or the economy.

Approximately, 14% of adults say they have either recently lost their dental benefit coverage and/or their coverage has been greatly reduced by their employer.

### Subgroup Differences

- Younger adults (those less than 35 years old) are more likely than older adults (those ages 55+) to say they have held off going to the dentist because of uncertainty about their job or the economy (22% vs. 13% respectively).
- Adults who earn \$100K or more per year are more likely than those who make less than \$15k per year to currently have a dentist (83% vs. 45% respectively) and, have some sort of dental benefit (74% vs. 42% respectively)
- Adults who earn less than \$15k per year are more likely than those who make \$100K or more per year to:
  - Have an unmet dental need (31% vs. 2% respectively) and,
  - Have held off going to the dentist because of uncertainty about their job or the economy (31% vs. 7% respectively) and,
  - Have some form of dental benefit but yet still have an unmet dental need (9% vs. 1%).
- Employed adults are more likely than unemployed adults to:
  - Currently have a dentist (70% vs. 56% respectively) and,
  - Currently have some sort of dental benefit (63% vs. 43% respectively)
- White adults are more likely than Black adults to currently have a dentist (67% vs. 46% respectively).<sup>1</sup>

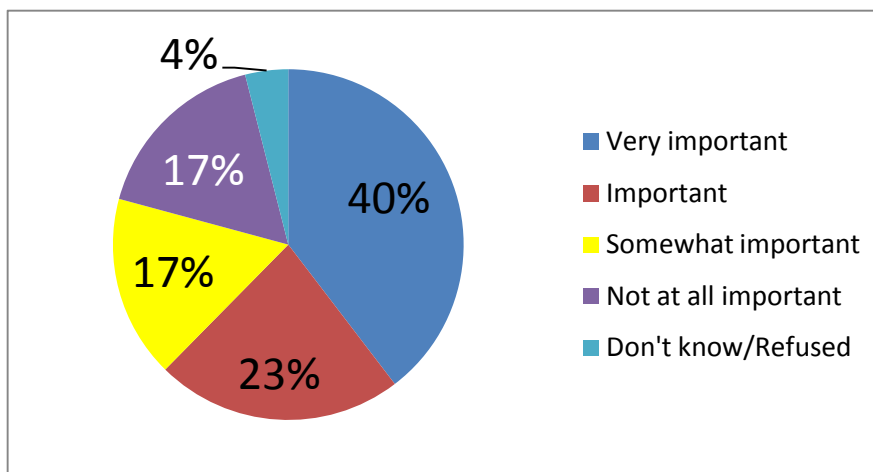
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<sup>1</sup> Use caution when interpreting all results based on Black adults and Hispanic adults due to small base size.

**How important is it to you that universal dental coverage is included as part of an overall healthcare reform package?**

The majority of U.S. adults (79%) think it's at least somewhat important that universal dental coverage is included as part of an overall healthcare reform package of which 40% think it's *very important*.

**How important is it to you that universal dental coverage is included as part of an overall healthcare reform package?**



**Subgroup Differences**

- Women are more likely than men to think it's at least somewhat important that universal dental coverage is included as part of an overall healthcare reform package (84% vs. 75% respectively)
- Adults who earn less than \$15k per year are more likely than those who make \$100K or more per year to think this is at least somewhat important (86% vs. 72% respectively)
- Black and Hispanic adults are more likely than White adults to think this is *very important* (58% and 52% vs. 36% respectively)
- Democrats are more likely than both Republicans and Independents to think this is *very important* (58% vs. 29% and 33% respectively)

## **How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?**

### **Statement One: It is very important that the government acts to provide *general health benefits* to most uninsured Americas.**

The majority of U.S. adults (69%) agree (strongly/somewhat) with this statement of which 44% *strongly agree*. Moreover, less than 1 in 5 adults strongly disagree (18%).

- Women are more likely than men to agree (76% vs. 61% respectively).
- Younger adults (those less than 35 years old) are more likely than older adults (those ages 55+) to agree with this statement (78% vs. 65% respectively)
- Adults who earn less than \$15k per year are more likely than those who make \$100K or more per year to agree (88% vs. 58% respectively)
- Black adults are more likely than White adults to agree (86% vs. 66% respectively)
- Democrats are more likely than both Republicans and Independents to agree (90% vs. 47% and 67% respectively)

### **Statement Two: It is very important that the government acts to provide *dental benefits* to most uninsured Americas.**

About 2 in 3 adults (67%) agree (strongly/somewhat) with this statement, with about 1 in 3 adults (35%) saying they *strongly agree*.

- Women are more likely than men to agree (73% vs. 60% respectively)
- Younger adults (those less than 35 years old) are more likely than older adults (those ages 55+) to agree with this statement (77% vs. 62% respectively)
- Adults who earn less than \$15k per year are more likely than those who make \$100K or more per year to agree (92% vs. 52% respectively) and
- Black adults are more likely than White and Hispanic adults to agree (92% vs. 63% and 71% respectively).  
Democrats are more likely than both Republicans and Independents to agree (90% vs. 47% and 62% respectively)

### **Statement Three: You would be willing to pay higher taxes or premiums to increase the number of Americans who have dental benefits.**

Just over half of U.S. adults (52%) disagree (strongly/somewhat) with this statement, with just over 1 in 3 saying they *strongly disagree* (35%).

- Men are more likely than women to *strongly disagree* (40% vs. 30% respectively).
- Older adults (those ages 55+) are more likely than younger adults (those less than 35 years old) to *strongly disagree* with this statement (42% vs. 25% respectively)
- Those who make \$100K or more per year are more likely than those who earn less than \$15k per year to disagree (61% vs. 37% respectively)
- Republicans are more likely than both Democrats and Independents to disagree (69% vs. 38% and 53% respectively)

### **Statement Four: Lack of proper dental care can lead to overall poor health.**

The vast majority of adults (92%) agree (strongly/somewhat) with this statement, with just over 2 in 3 adults (68%) saying they *strongly agree*. Moreover only 2% strongly disagree.

- Women are more likely than men to agree (95% vs. 89% respectively)
- Democrats are more likely than both Republicans and Independents to *strongly agree* (78% vs. 63% and 64% respectively).

**Statement Five: Dental benefits are as important as general medical benefits in one's overall healthcare benefit package.**

About 4 in 5 adults (81%) agree (strongly/somewhat), and nearly half (48%) *strongly agree* with this statement. Moreover only 8% strongly disagree.

- Women are more likely than men to agree (87% vs. 75% respectively) and *strongly agree* (59% vs. 37% respectively) with this statement.
- Younger adults (those less than 35 years old) are more likely than older adults (those ages 55+) to agree (88% vs. 72% respectively)
- Adults who earn less than \$15k per year are more likely than those who make \$100K or more per year to agree (94% vs. 77% respectively)
- Black adults are more likely than White adults to agree (94% vs. 79% respectively) and Black adults are more likely than both White and Hispanic adults to *strongly agree* (69% vs. 45% and 48% respectively) with this statement.
- Democrats are more likely than both Republicans and Independents to agree (91% vs. 77% and 76% respectively)

**Statement 6: It is important that all older adults, over the age of 65, have full dental benefits, even if the government has to provide them.**

About 3 in 4 adults agree (73%) (strongly/somewhat) with this statement and nearly half (45%) *strongly agree*. Moreover, only about 1 in 10 (13%) strongly disagree.

- Women are more likely than men to agree (80% vs. 66% respectively)
- Younger adults (those less than 35 years old) are more likely than older adults (those ages 55+) to agree with this statement (85% vs. 68% respectively)
- Adults who earn less than \$15k per year are more likely than those who make \$100K or more per year to agree (94% vs. 62% respectively)
- Black adults are more likely than both White and Hispanic adults to agree (98% vs. 69% and 79% respectively)
- Democrats are more likely than both Republicans and Independents to agree (90% vs. 59% and 68% respectively)

**Statement 7: It is important that all children, under the age of 18, have full dental benefits, even if the government has to provide them.**

Just over 3 in 4 adults agree (78%) (strongly/somewhat) with this statement and over half (57%) *strongly agree*. Moreover, only about 1 in 10 adults strongly disagree (12%).

- Women are more likely than men to agree (84% vs. 72% respectively)
- Younger adults (those less than 35 years old) are more likely than older adults (those ages 55+) to agree with this statement (89% vs. 72% respectively)
- Adults who earn less than \$15k per year are more likely than those who make \$100K or more per year to agree (92% vs. 69% respectively)
- Black adults are more likely than White adults to agree (94% vs. 75% respectively)
- Democrats are more likely than both Republicans and Independents to agree (94% vs. 64% and 74% respectively)

**How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? (Note: Don't know/Refused to answer percentages are not included and range from 1%-2%)**

