

Oral Health Access and Status Across Washington

August 28, 2025

ARCORA
Foundation
Bending the Arc of Oral Health Toward Equity

A group of diverse people are laughing and smiling outdoors at a sunny gathering. In the foreground, a woman with curly hair and a blue shirt is laughing heartily. To her right, an older man is also laughing. In the background, other people are visible, including a man in a blue shirt and a woman in a white dress. The scene is set against a backdrop of green trees and a bright sky.

VISION

All people can enjoy good oral and overall health with no one left behind.

MISSION

Bend the arc of oral health toward equity.

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Oral Health Is Essential to Overall Health

Oral disease is mostly preventable.

The health of your smile affects your overall health. Research shows links between poor oral health and conditions like:



Diabetes



Heart disease



Stroke



**Pregnancy
complications**

Apple Health Enrollment and Utilization Snapshot

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Scale of Apple Health

The Apple Health dental program is crucial for

29%

of Washingtonians in accessing dental care and maintaining a healthy mouth.

That includes **1 million** children and **1.3 million adults** eligible for a complete range of dental services, from preventive to restorative work.

1 in 4

people from Washington receive their dental coverage through Apple Health.



5%

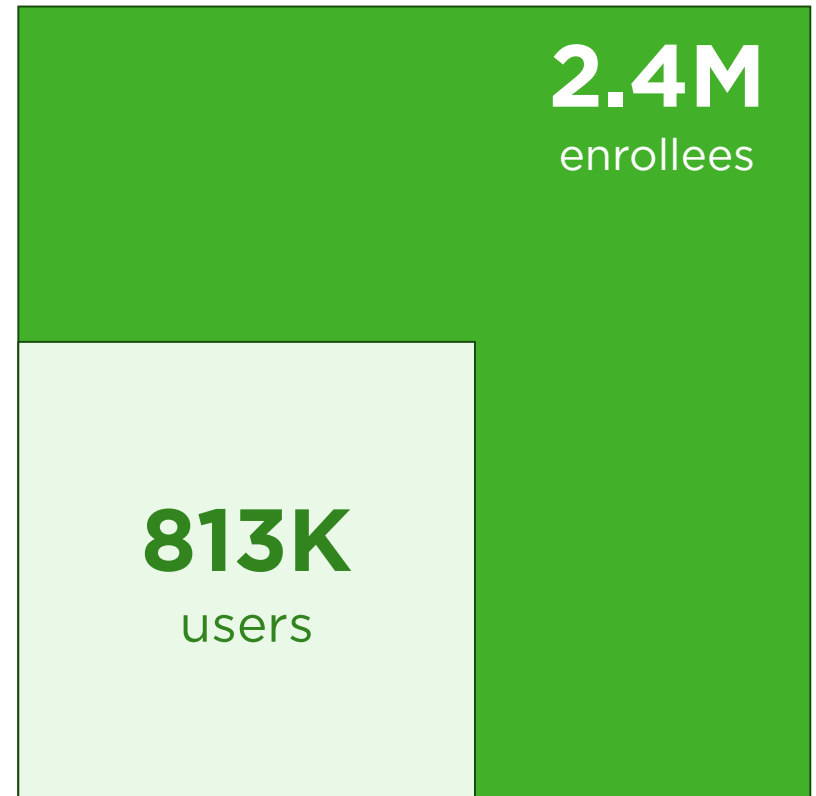
more people utilized services in FY23 than in FY22.



Apple Health Dental Users

1.5 M

Apple Health enrollees didn't access dental care in FY23, including **1M adults** and **500K children**.



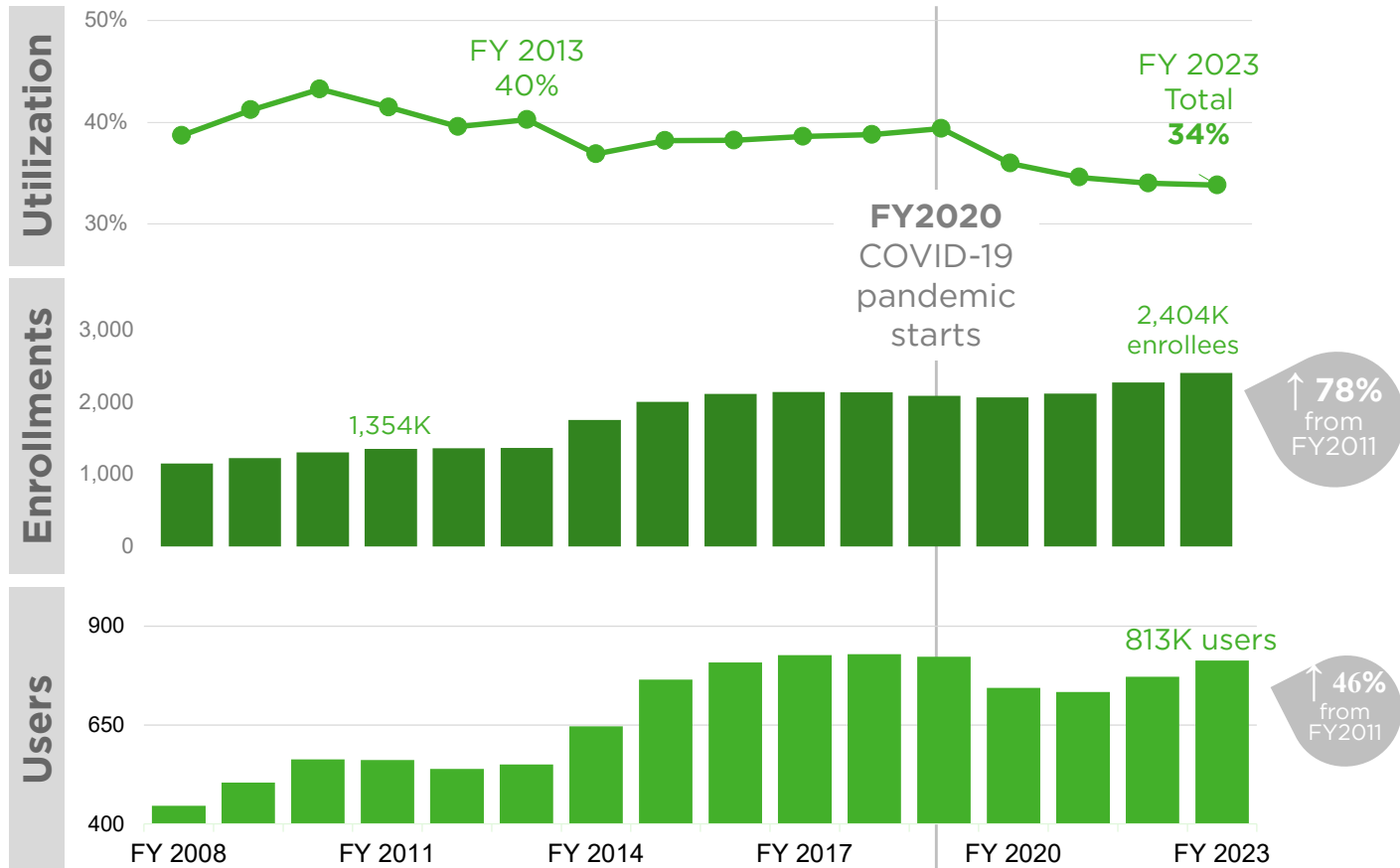
Apple Health Dental Users

Only
34%
of enrollees
accessed care
in FY23



Why The Utilization Rate Has Declined

Increases in enrollments outpace users, driving the decline in the utilization rate



> Utilization rates slightly **decreased from 34.0% to 33.8%** due to the higher increase in the number of adult enrollees in FY 2023.

> **Enrollees** increased by 6%

> **Users** increased by 5% (40k additional users).

> Overall dental utilization rates have not reached pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels yet.

Note: Adult dental benefits were cut in January 2011 and were restored in January 2014. FY 2014 data reflects 6 months of services, while FY 2015-FY 2023 data reflect full years of adult dental services. Source: Washington State Health Care Authority, Apple Health Dental Services FY 2023 Utilization

Utilization Gaps between Medicaid and Private Insurance



Apple Health Dental Users Children and Adults

One in two child enrollees did not access dental care, while nearly four in five adults did not see a dentist in FY23.

Apple Health Adults

80% of enrollees
did not access care



Apple Health Children

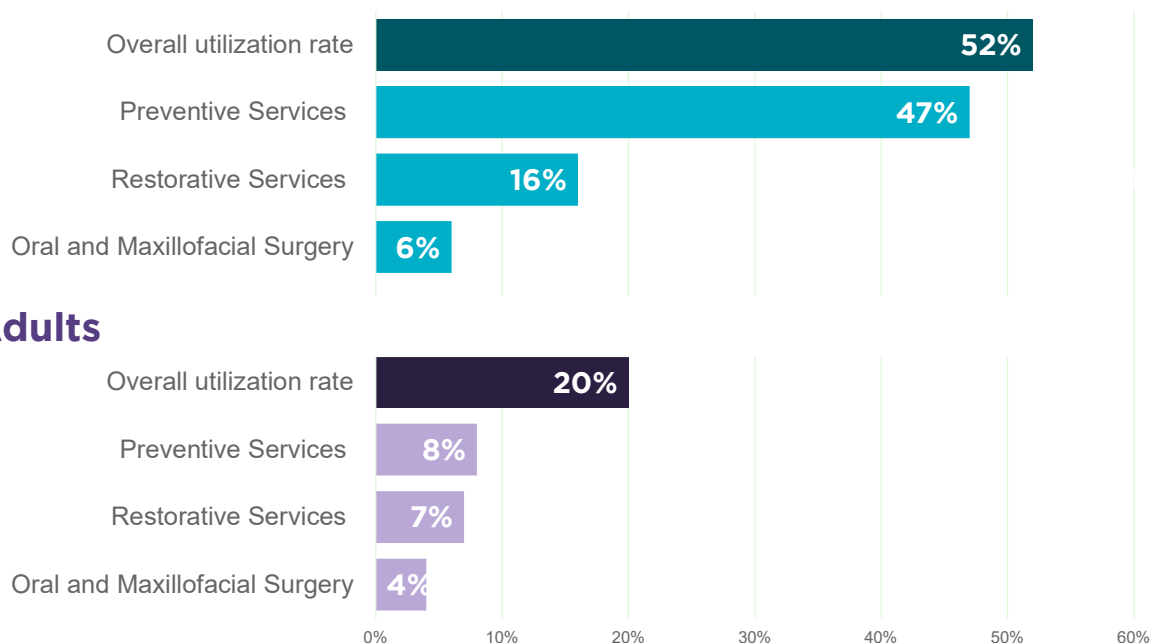
49%



Utilization by Care Type

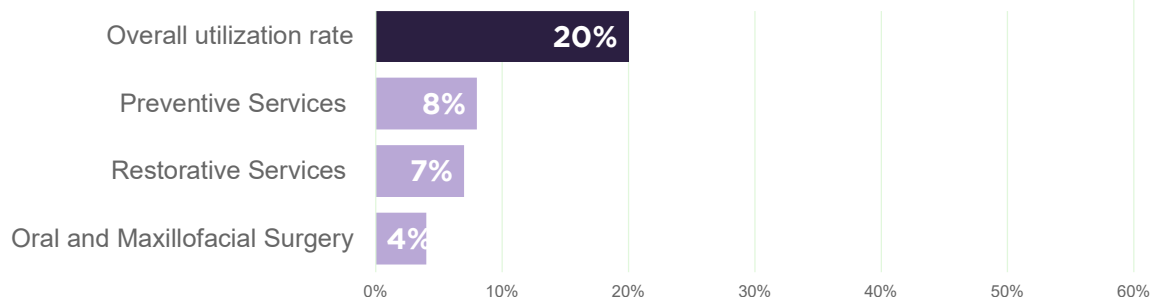
Both adults and children have major missed opportunities for preventive care in FY23.

Children 20 years and under



- > For **children**, utilization is 3 times higher for preventive services than restorative services.
- > For **adults**, utilization across procedure types is fairly even, indicating that those receiving restorative services or surgery are not often receiving preventive services too.

Adults

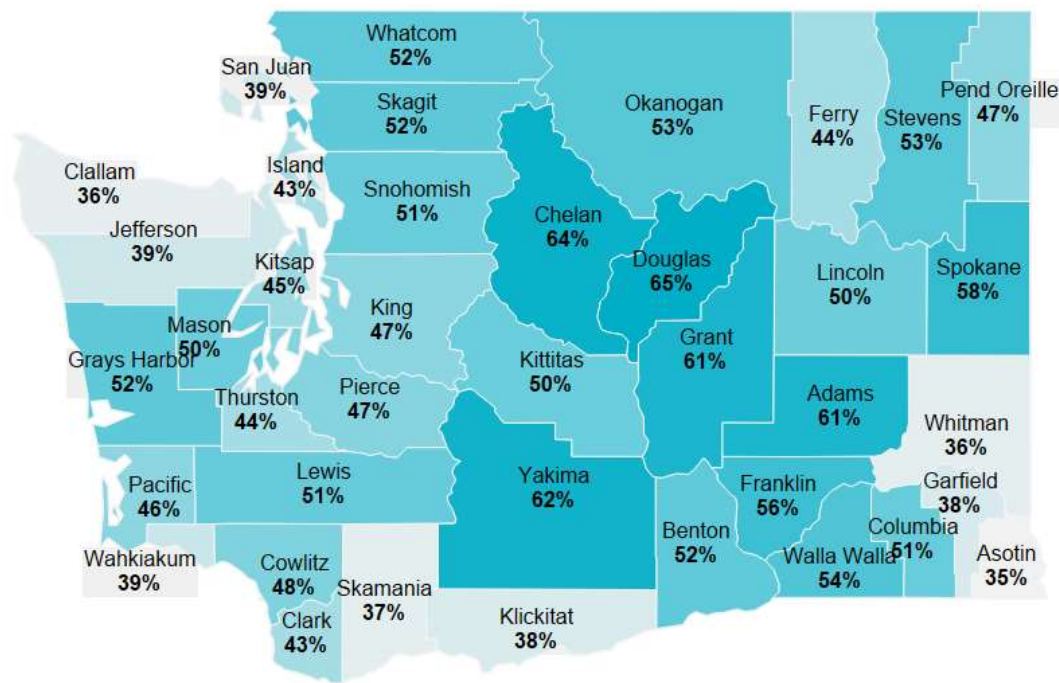


Lower cost **Higher cost**

Preventive Restorative Oral and maxillofacial surgery

Apple Heath Dental Utilization by County (FY23) Children under 20 years

14 counties had a higher utilization than the state's average of 51.5%



FY23 Statewide Utilization
Rate for children under 20
years old

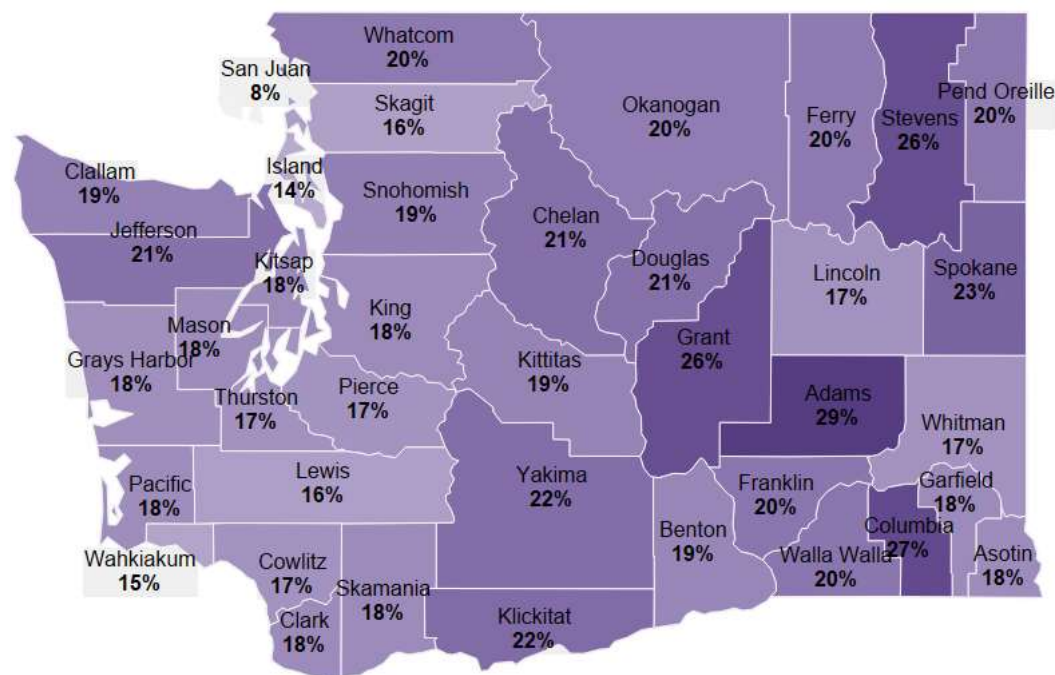
51.5%

Number of counties by utilization rate (<20yrs)



Apple Heath Dental Utilization by County (FY23) Adults

16 counties had a higher utilization than the state's average of 19.6%



FY23 Statewide Utilization Rate for adults

19.6%

- > Highest: Adams County (29%)
- > Lowest: San Juan County (7.7%)

Number of counties by utilization rate (<6yo)



Access to Community Water Fluoridation

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Fluoridation Status by County (2015)

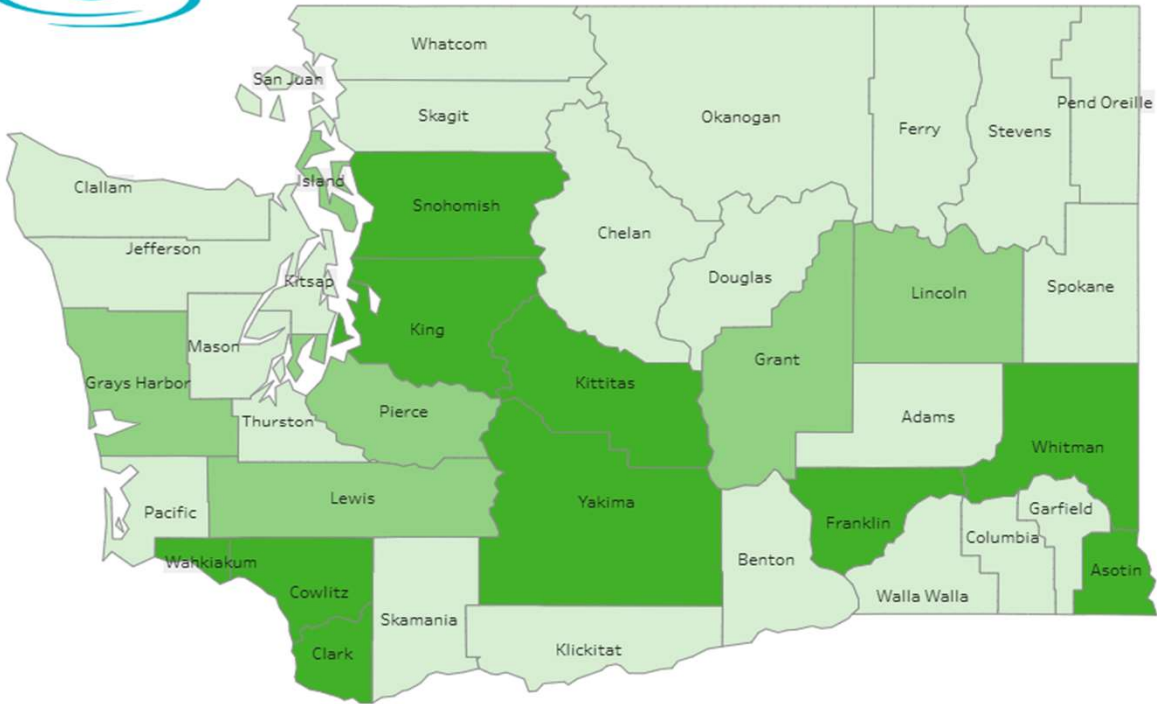
% of Population who Receive Fluoridated Water →

Less than 33%

33% to 66%

More than 66%

Statewide: 56% National: 72.3%



Percent of Population on Community Water Systems Receiving Fluoridated Water in 2015

56% of Washington's Population



72.3% of United States' Population

Data Source:
Sentry database. Available from:
<https://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment>

Notes:
Fluoridating systems do not include all fluoridated systems; they exclude intertied and naturally fluoridated water systems. However, the color-coded percentage of the population who receive fluoridated water by county does represent all types of fluoridated systems. Exact value per county is not available as water systems overlap in some counties.

Oral Health Outcomes

Washington State Smile Survey 2023-2024

Too many children are in pain. And oral pain is disrupting learning



2 in 3

third graders in Washington have experienced tooth decay.

More than 1 in 5 have rampant decay (7+ teeth). For children from low income households, that increases to 1 in 3 children.

1 in 5

third graders have untreated cavities.

12% 2015-16

19% 2023-24

% 3rd graders with untreated cavities

The untreated decay rate has risen back to 2005 levels after a decade of decline

65% of third graders have tooth decay in 2024. This rate represents nearly two-thirds of all third graders in Washington.

Washington State Smile Survey 2023-2024

Untreated Decay, Inequities Increase in Children's Oral Health

2nd and 3rd graders from low-income households are **more than twice as likely to suffer from rampant tooth decay** compared to higher income peers.

32% of low-income 2nd and 3rd graders

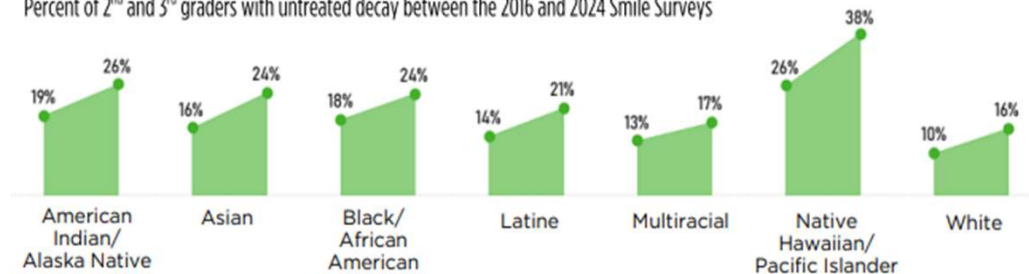
14% not low-income

% 3rd graders with rampant tooth decay by free and reduced lunch qualification



Untreated decay has increased across all race/ethnicity groups since 2016, with children of color more likely to have untreated decay.

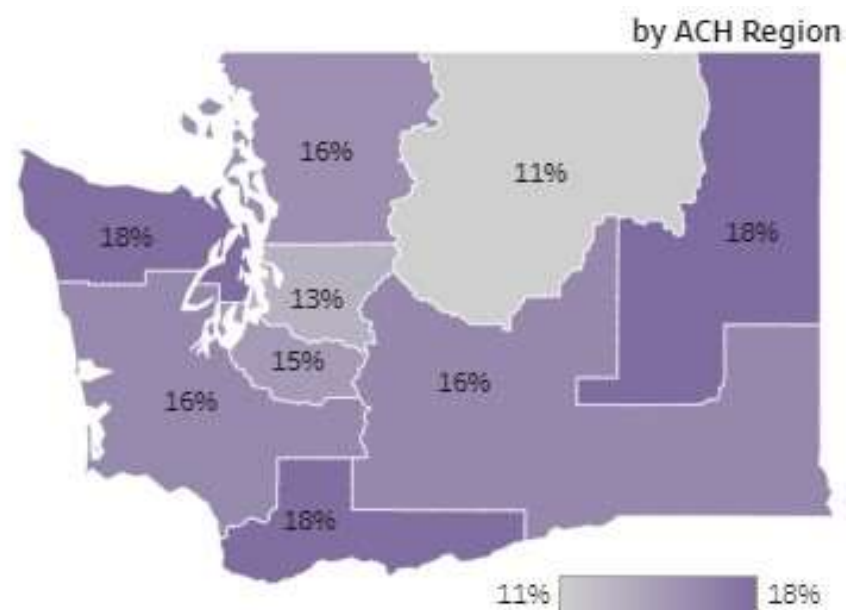
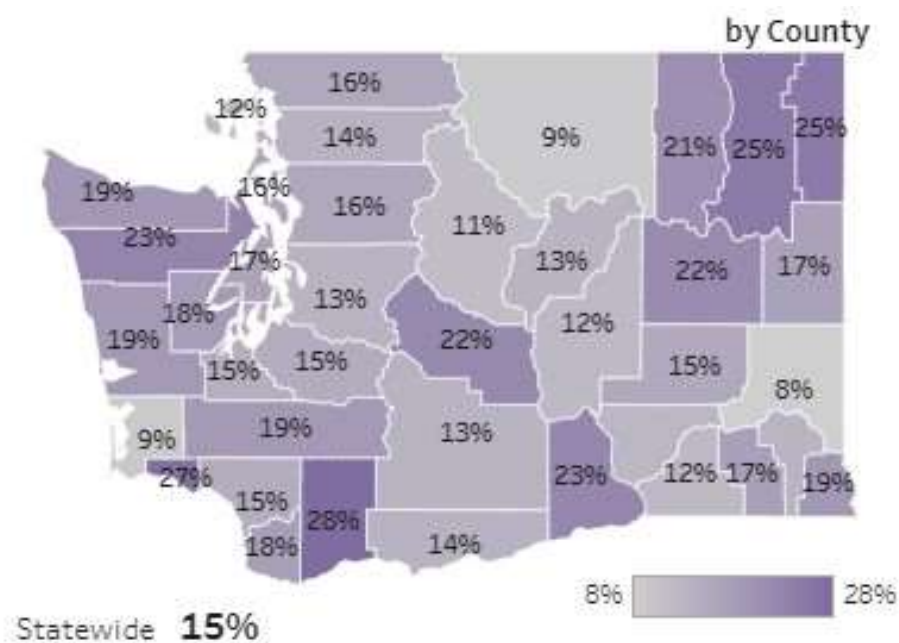
Percent of 2nd and 3rd graders with untreated decay between the 2016 and 2024 Smile Surveys



Equity gaps in oral health outcomes persist. Data shows **increasing untreated decay** and widening disparities across groups, with **children of color** experiencing **more untreated decay**

Children of **Indigenous or Hispanic** descent are significantly **more likely to have cavities** than their peers who are Black, Asian, or White

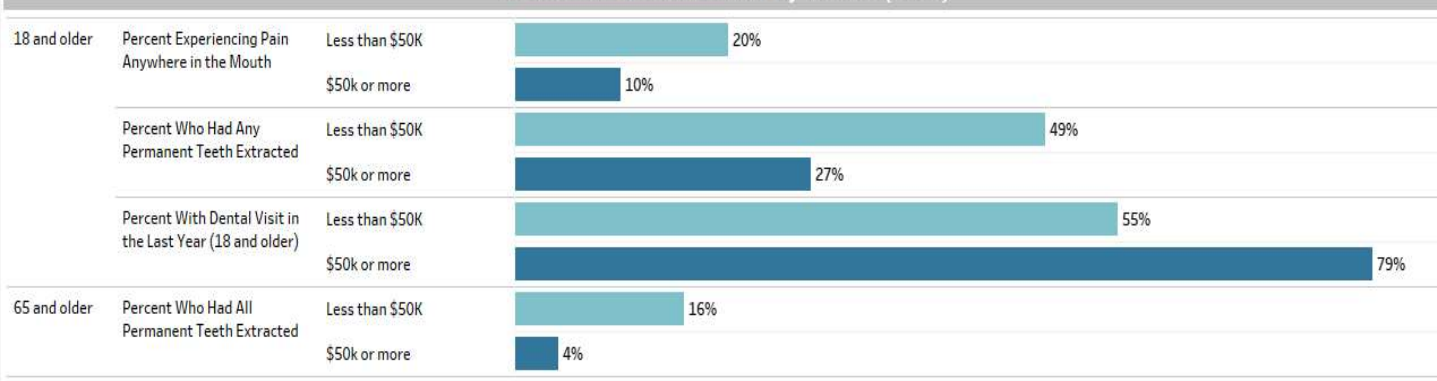
WA Adults Reporting Pain in the Mouth in Last Year (2018)



Source: Washington State Department of Health (DOH), Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data (BRFSS). Olympia, WA, 2018

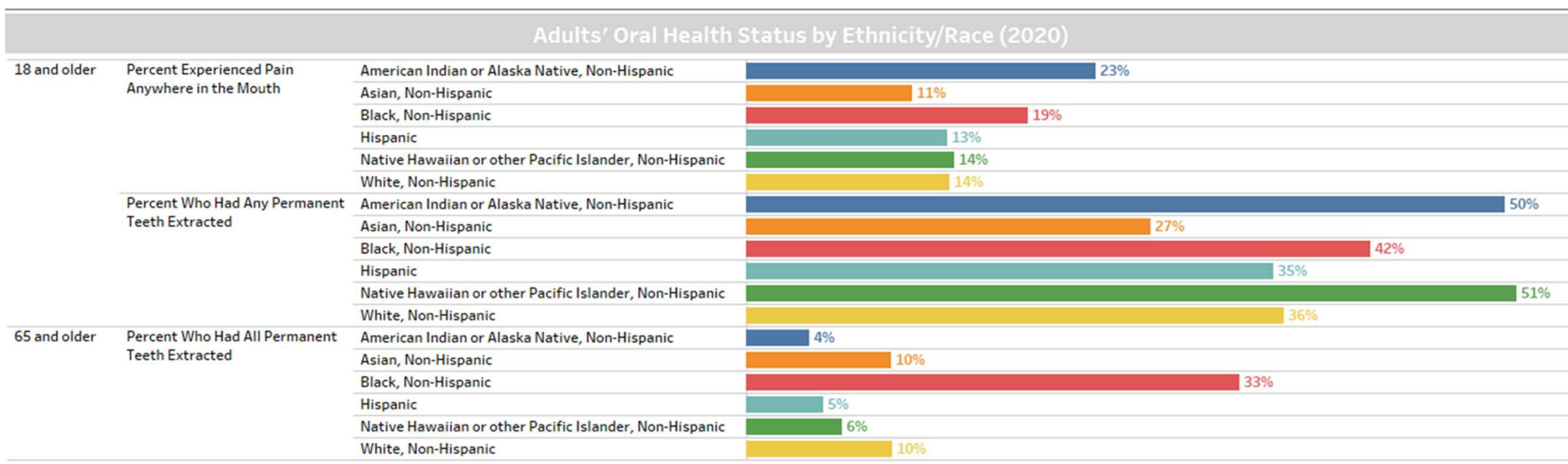
Oral Health Income Disparities Among Adults (2020)

Adults' Oral Health Status by Income (2020)



- > **Lower income** adults are **less likely** to have a **dental visit**.
- > **Low-income** adults (age 18+) are **more likely** to experience **pain in the mouth** and have **permanent teeth extracted** than higher income adults.
- > **Low-income** older adults (age 65+) are **more likely** to have had **all permanent teeth extracted** than higher income adults.

Adult Oral Health Status Data by Race/Ethnicity (2020)



- **American Indian/Alaska Native** adults have the highest rates of pain in the mouth
- **Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander** and **American Indian/Alaska Native** adults have the highest rates of any permanent teeth extraction.
- **Black** older adults aged 65 and over have the highest rates of all permanent teeth extracted

Patient Perspectives



- > **Dental care is consistently the most-requested service at the Seattle/King County Clinic**
- > **Patients from 16 WA counties (2024 clinic)**

Source: 2024 Seattle/King County Clinic Report: <https://seattlecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/2024-SKCC-Final-Report-Compressed-10.01.24.pdf>
Photo: Arcora Foundation

Questions

For more analytics on dental health in Washington, see Arcora's Data Reports & Dashboards resources on **arcorafoundation.org/data-dashboards**

Questions or feedback about our data reports can be directed to Alia Katabi (akatabi@arcorafoundation.org)

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