

# Health Center Program Fact Sheet

## America's Primary Care Safety Net Working to Address Oral Health

For the last 50 years, health centers have delivered comprehensive, high-quality, cost-effective primary health care to patients regardless of their ability to pay. Health centers advance the health home model of coordinated, comprehensive, and patient-centered care, providing a wide range of medical, dental, behavioral health, and enabling services. Today, nearly 1,400 health centers operate over 9,800 service delivery sites that provide care in every U.S. State, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Pacific Basin to serve over 24 million patients in 2015. Nearly half of all health centers serve rural populations. In addition, health centers serve a diverse patient population, including more than 60% of whom are racial or ethnic minorities. About 24% of health center patients are uninsured and 71% are at or below the 100% federal poverty level.

The Surgeon General's landmark report [Oral Health in America](#) brought national attention to the importance of and disparities present in oral health.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the 2011 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report [Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Vulnerable and Underserved Populations](#) stated that unmet oral health care needs faced by these populations cannot be neglected given the connection between oral health and overall health.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) [Oral Health Strategic Framework, 2014-2017](#) outlined oral health priorities and current and planned activities to eliminate oral health disparities and improve oral health across HHS and its federal partners.

### Oral Health and the Health Center Program

Oral health is integral to overall health and well-being.<sup>3</sup> Untreated dental caries can cause pain and infection that may lead to numerous problems such as eating, speaking, sleeping, learning, and attending school or work.<sup>4</sup> Although significant progress has been made to decrease dental caries over the past 4 decades, disparities remain among certain population groups including children, uninsured, low-income, and racial/ethnic minorities.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there are 5,434 dental professional shortage areas in the U.S. with 51.2 million people living in them.<sup>6</sup>

HRSA supported health centers continue to support increased access to oral health in the communities they serve.

- 89% of health centers provide preventive dental services either directly or via contract with dental providers.

According to 2015 Uniform Data System (UDS) data, health centers reported the following:

- 5.2 million dental patients served
- 42.5% of children 6-9 years of age at elevated caries risk received dental sealants on at least one permanent first molar
- 4,108 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) dentists and 1,921 FTE dental hygienists are working at health centers



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Selected Dental Services Provided in 2015	Number of Visits	Number of Patients <sup>1</sup>
Emergency Services	246,558	209,291
Oral Exams	5,517,050	4,219,618
Prophylaxis	3,271,149	2,617,624
Sealants	464,034	376,237
Fluoride Treatment	2,236,271	1,774,349
Restorative Services	3,003,271	1,532,054
Oral Surgery	1,217,723	900,449
Rehabilitative Services	1,383,491	685,976

<sup>1</sup>Some patients received more than one service and may be represented more than once.

## BPHC Activities in Support of Oral Health

BPHC remains committed to increasing access to high-quality, oral health in all communities via four key strategies:

- 1. Increase access to oral health care for underserved populations**
  - 420 health center grantees received an Oral Health Service Expansion award in FY 2016 to increase oral health services
- 2. Modernize the safety-net infrastructure and delivery system**
  - 69% of health centers are Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) recognized which includes emphasis on care coordination, patient self-management, and ongoing quality improvement areas including oral health
- 3. Improve health outcomes**
  - Introduction of the first oral health measure to UDS 2015
  - In 2015, the health center dental sealants measure exceeded the HP2020 goal
- 4. Promote an innovative organizational culture**
  - Encourage interprofessional team-based care and the integration of oral health and primary care
  - Support for ongoing oral health quality improvement and clinical performance reporting including the Dental Sealants Measure

## Oral Health Resources

### General Information and Technical Assistance for Health Centers

- HRSA Bureau of Primary Health Care: Oral Health and Primary Care Integration: <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/qualityimprovement/clinicalquality/oralhealth/>
- HRSA Oral Health: <http://www.hrsa.gov/publichealth/clinical/oralhealth/>
- National Network for Oral Health Access (NNOHA): <http://www.nnoha.org/>
- National Association of Community Health Centers: <http://nachc.org/>
- ECRI Resource Page: Dental Services and Oral Health: <https://www.ecri.org/components/HRSA/Pages/DentalServices.aspx>

This publication lists non-federal resources in order to provide additional information to consumers. The views and content in these resources have not been formally approved by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) or the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). Neither HHS nor HRSA endorses the products or services of the listed resources.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> IOM (Institute of Medicine) and NRC (National Research Council). 2011. *Improving access to oral health care for vulnerable and underserved populations*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> IOM (Institute of Medicine) and NRC (National Research Council), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Health Resources and Services Administration. Data Warehouse. Quick Reports: Designated HPSA Statistics. Accessed at <https://datawarehouse.hrsa.gov/topics/shortageAreas.aspx> on November 14, 2016