COALITION UPDATE

NYS Oral Health Coalition Policy Agenda

Melissa Wendland

Chair, NYS Oral Health Coalition

NEW YORK STATE ORAL HEALTH COALITION



2026 Policy Agenda

Statewide Infrastructure and Workforce

- **Support** re-establishment of the Bureau of Dental Health within the NYS Department of Health
- **Support** the authorization of dental therapy in New York to improve access to oral health services

Veterans

- **Support** the federal Dental Care for Veterans Act (H.R. 210)
- **Coordinate** a Veterans Oral Health Roundtable in 2027
- **Support** inclusion of veteran oral health in NYS Department of Health community health planning

Children and Families

- **Support** allowing parents and guardians to apply fluoride varnish under the supervision of a provider
- **Support** Medicaid reimbursement for fluoride varnish for pregnant women and for children over age six in medical offices

People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)

- **Support** required I/DD training in continuing education for dentist and dental hygienist re-licensure
- **Support** reform and expansion of the RE95 reimbursement program
  - Simplify RE95 administrative and billing requirements
  - Increase provider awareness of the Medicaid increase for eligible I/DD patients
- **Support** a statewide provider directory and referral network for I/DD patients

WORK GROUP PRESENTATIONS

Work Group Presentations and Discussion

Children and Families | Veterans Oral Health

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WORK GROUP PRESENTATION

Children and Families

Bridget Walsh

Senior Policy Manager, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

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Why Oral Health Matters for Children and Families

- **Prevent disease before it starts,** reducing the need for costly restorative treatment.
- **Establish healthy behaviors** that last throughout life.
- **Reduce disparities** by reaching children at highest risk through trusted community programs.
- **Improve school readiness** by reducing pain and infection that interfere with learning.
- **Build family capacity** by educating parents and caregivers about oral health.

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Data Reveals Persistent Challenges

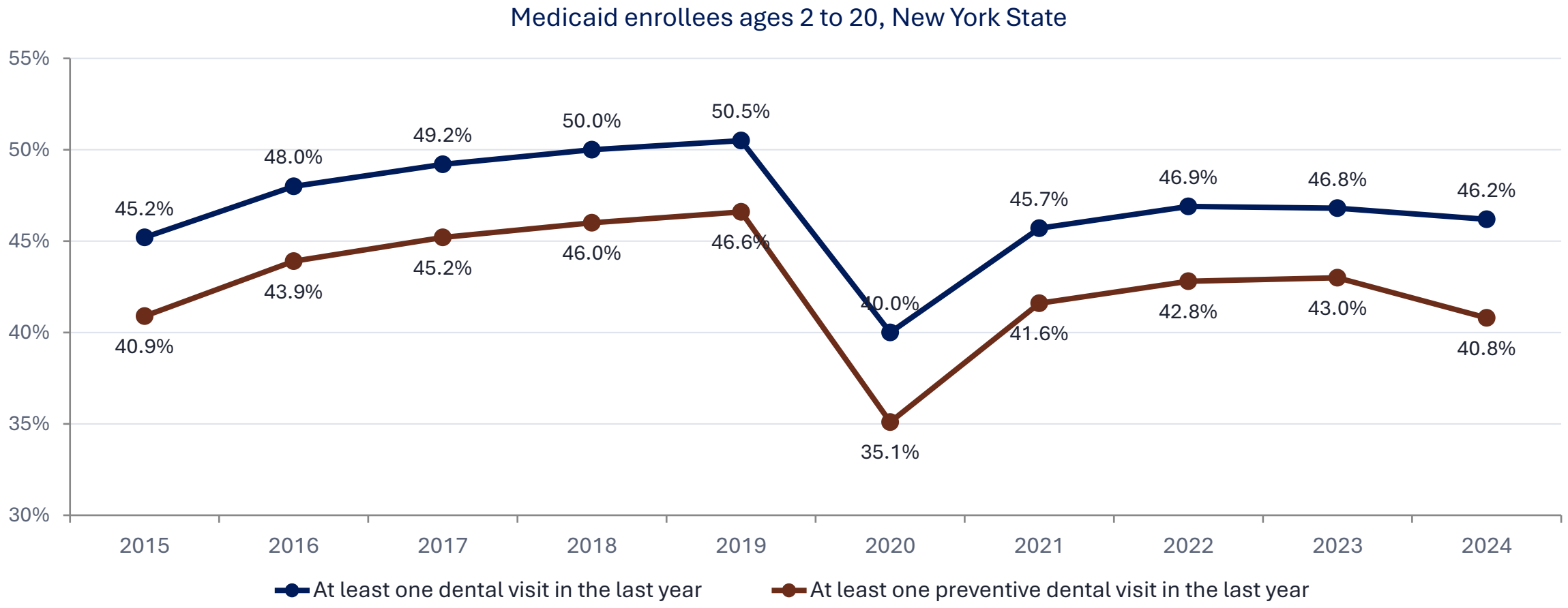
Only 14% of NY children report oral health problems, but rates are higher among children living in poverty.

Preventive service use among children enrolled in Medicaid remains low.

Dental disease is the most common unmet health need for children with special health care needs.

Geographic disparities mean that children in rural areas and high-need urban communities face the greatest barriers.

Dental Visits Among Medicaid-Enrolled Children Topped 50% Just Once in a Decade



Source: New York State Department of Health (2026). New York State Community Health Indicator Report Dashboard (CHIRS).

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Early Childhood Oral Health Summit 2022





Partners from across New York came together to shape recommendations for young children.

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Recommendations from the Summit



Improving the Oral Health of Young Children in New York

Recommendations from the NYS Early Childhood Oral Health Summit

Scan for the full report

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Progress Since 2022

- Created an online library of oral health resources for early childhood providers: the NYS Oral Health Otter
- NY has increased funding for school-based dental programs
- LPNs and dental assistants are allowed to apply fluoride varnish
- Legislation to allow parents and guardians to apply fluoride varnish
- NY had a successful waiver to allow Medicaid continuous eligibility
- Conversations happening on stand-alone dental coverage on the Exchange
- Conversations on community health worker oral health training

RECOMMENDATIONS

Support Prevention

1. **Support** changes that would allow parents and guardians to administer fluoride varnish under the supervision of a provider.

2. **Support** expanding Medicaid reimbursement for fluoride varnish where people already receive care:
   - Fluoride varnish for pregnant women
   - Fluoride varnish for children over six in medical offices

3. **Support** re-establishment of the Bureau of Dental Health within the New York State Department of Health.

4. **Support** the authorization of dental therapy in New York to improve access to prevention and treatment services.

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Discussion

What programs can the Coalition advance to promote the development of medical-dental integration projects around New York State?



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Questions for the Room

> ***When a child's pediatrician and dentist work as a team, we can stop small problems in the mouth before they become big ones for the whole child.***

1. What gets in the way for families now, and who are we not yet hearing from?

2. Pilot programs often start with grant funding and then end when it does. What would a pilot need to show for funders to back it, and for public systems and payers to carry it forward?

3. What is one concrete step the Coalition could take in the next year to move a promising pilot toward lasting policy or payment change, and who should we invite to help?

WORK GROUP PRESENTATION

Veterans Oral Health

Lindsay Wright and Gregg Salzman

Community Coalition Coordinator, Erie County Health | COO, DentServ

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Meet the Veterans Oral Health Work Group



Lindsay Wright

Community Coalition Coordinator, Erie County Health



Gregg Salzman

COO, DentServ

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newyorkohc.org

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A National Call to Improve Veterans' Dental Care



Play the CareQuest video

National campaign on the urgent need to improve dental care access for veterans. Click the play button to open it on YouTube.

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The National Picture

18M

Veterans in the United States

9M

Receive health care from the VA

1.8M

Eligible for VA dental benefits

582K

Actually receive dental care

Only a small share of veterans who use VA health care can get dental care through it.

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Why Veterans' Oral Health Matters in New York

591,307

veterans live in New York State

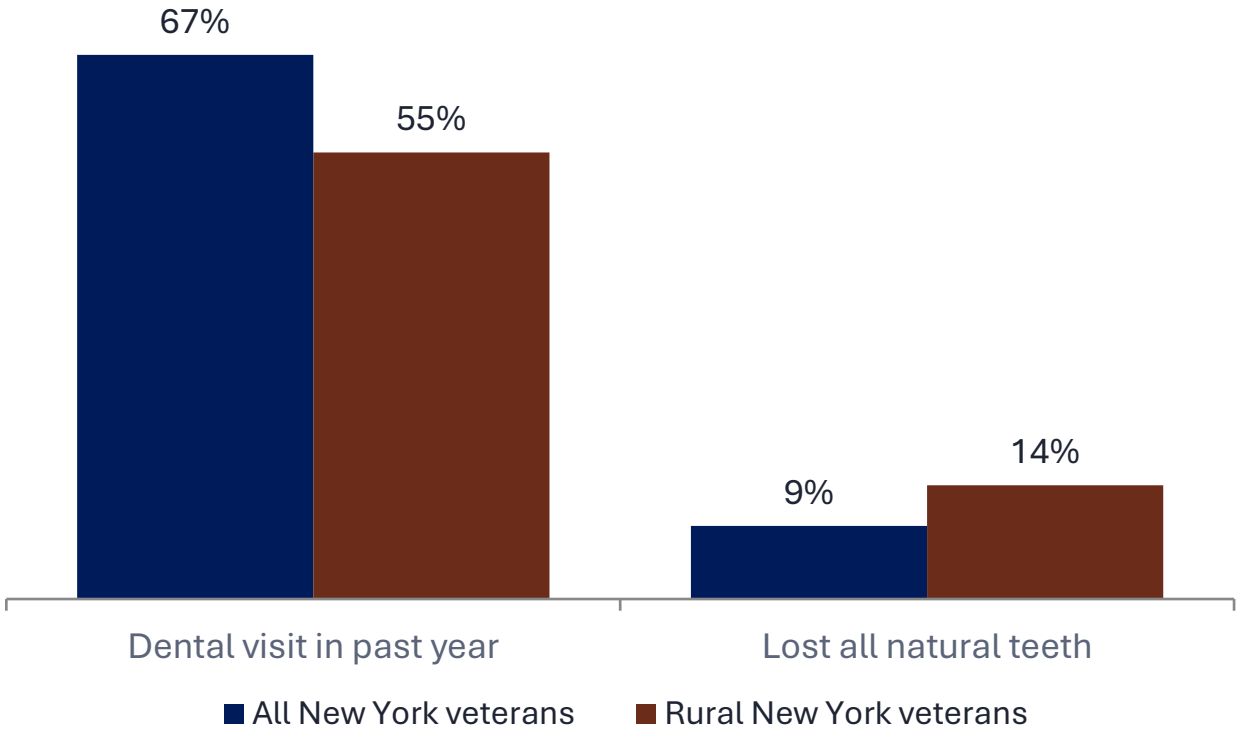
Nearly 25,000

New York veterans live in rural communities

44%

of New York veterans (260,175) are retired and aging

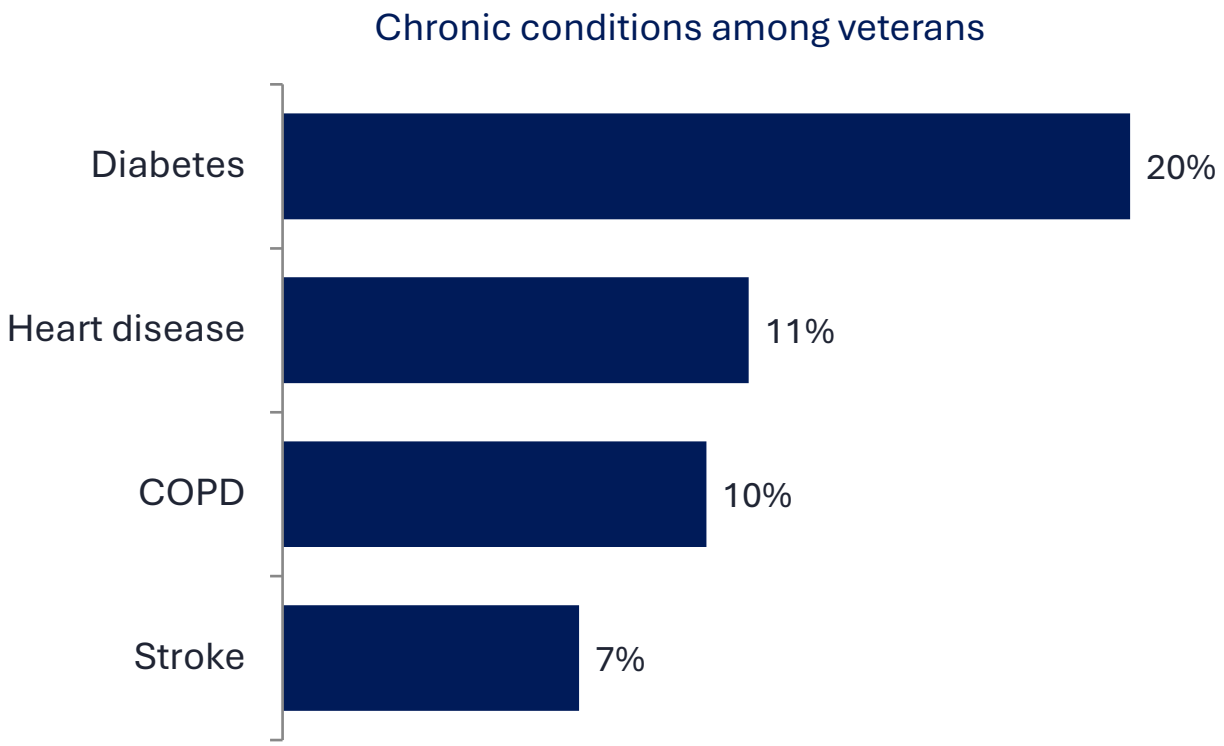
Rural veterans see the dentist less and lose more teeth



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Oral Health Is Health

Oral disease contributes to poor overall health. Veterans experience high rates of chronic conditions linked to oral health.



Untreated dental conditions can lead to pain, infection, lost productivity, and increased healthcare costs.

Veterans often face unique barriers to obtaining timely oral healthcare.

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RECOMMENDATION

Sign On to H.R. 210

H.R. 210

Dental Care for Veterans Act

Would require the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to provide dental care in the same manner as other medical services, bringing oral health into whole-person care for veterans.

action.openoralhealth.org

Scan to take action

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Why Veterans Struggle to Access Oral Health Care



Policy and Coverage

- Federal eligibility rules determine access to benefits
- Congressional action is often required to expand coverage



Workforce

- Dental workforce shortages
- Difficulty recruiting providers in rural areas



Cost

- Limited insurance coverage
- High out-of-pocket expenses



Access

- Transportation barriers
- Geographic isolation

A Rural Health Issue

Many veterans live in rural communities where oral health care resources are limited.

Challenges include

- Provider shortages
- Long travel distances
- Aging populations
- Limited specialty care
- Higher rates of chronic disease

OPPORTUNITY

Align veteran oral health strategies with broader rural health transformation efforts.



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Join the Veteran Oral Health Strategy Lab



A new AIDPH technical assistance and capacity-building program

A free resource for organizations ready to build programs that support veterans' oral health.

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RECOMMENDATION FOR DISCUSSION

Convene a Veterans Oral Health Roundtable

Bring together:

- Veterans organizations
- NYS Department of Health
- CareQuest
- VA representatives
- Rural health leaders
- Providers and community partners

Goal: develop actionable recommendations aligned with national, state, and regional priorities.

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VETERANS ORAL HEALTH

Conversation

What practical, achievable steps can improve oral health for veterans across New York State?



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PANEL DISCUSSION

Oral Health Care for People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

I/DD Panel

Moderated by Sally Dreslin, Executive Director, Step Two Policy Project



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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. • **Support** required I/DD training in continuing education for dentist and dental hygienist re-licensure

2. • **Support** reform and expansion of the RE95 reimbursement program
   - Simplify RE95 administrative and billing requirements
   - Increase provider awareness of the MA increase for eligible I/DD patients

3. • **Support** a statewide provider directory and referral network for I/DD patients

4. **Support** the authorization of dental therapy in New York to improve access to prevention and treatment services.

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TAKE ACTION

Support Dental Therapy in New York

Add your name

Show your support for authorizing dental therapy in New York to improve access to prevention and treatment services.

lp.constantcontactpages.com/sl/ioHZdjM/NYDentalTherapy

Scan to sign on

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