A Look at Dental Health

September 2019

Methods

Online, nationally representative survey of adults ages 45 and older fielded October 17-29, 2018 via NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel®, n=1,537 (web, n=1,056; phone, n=481). Includes oversamples of African Americans (n=334) and Hispanics (n=303).

Data are weighted according to the March 2018 Current Population Survey (CPS) by gender, age, region, metropolitan status, race/ethnicity, household income, education, language proficiency, and Hispanic origin.

Vendor

NORC at the University of Chicago conducted this survey on behalf of AARP.

For further information, please visit their website:

<https://amerispeak.norc.org/Pages/default.aspx>

<https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00306.002>

Main Questionnaire

Oral/Dental Care

Question 1: About how long has it been since you last saw a dentist or dental hygienist for dental care?

Within the last year	61%
1-2 years ago	17%
3-5 years ago	9%
More than five years ago	12%
Never	----

Question 2: [Among those who have seen a dentist] What was the main reason for your last visit for dental care? (n=1,531)

Regular check-up	32%
For teeth cleaning	26%
To have a tooth/teeth filled	7%
Trouble with gums	1%
To have tooth/teeth pulled	11%
A tooth ache	4%
Adjustment or repair of full or partial dentures	6%
To have a dental plate made	4%
For a dental emergency	1%
For some other reason, including teeth whitening	7%

Question 3: [Among those who have seen a dentist] Do you have a regular dentist or dental office, or not? (n=1,531)

Yes	74%
No	26%

Question 4: [Among those with a regular dentist] Thinking about your regular dentist or dental office, what type of office is this? [n=1,134]

Private dental office	82%
Dental chain store (like Aspen, Comfort, Smiles, Gentle)	9%
Health department or health clinic	5%
Free dental-only clinic	1%
Other	2%

Question 5: In the last 2 years, has there been a time when you needed dental care but you either delayed care or did not get the care?

	Yes	No
Delayed dental care?	34%	64%
Did not get dental care?	26%	29%

Question 6: [Among those who delayed or did not get dental care] Why was that? [n=588]

I couldn't find a dentist	5%
I am waiting until I have dental health insurance	12%
I didn't have time	20%
I thought it costs too much	48%
I don't have dental insurance	37%
I couldn't get an appointment	6%
It's too far to get there	2%
I didn't have a way to get there	3%
I couldn't take time off from work	5%
I didn't have anyone to care for my children or other family members	2%
Don't Know	2%

Question 7: What type of dental care, if any, do you think you need now?

A tooth filled or replaced (ie., fillings, crowns, and/or bridges)	27%
A tooth pulled	10%
Gum treatment	8%
Denture work	12%
Pain relief	3%
Cleaning	39%
Teeth whitening	8%
Work to improve appearance (ie., braces or bonding)	6%
None/Nothing	30%
Don't Know	1%

Question 8: In the last 2 years, have dental problems caused any of the following? [n=1,537]

	% Yes
Pain	32%
Problems with eating/chewing	32%
Sleep problems	11%
Had your sense of taste affected	9%
Missed work	4%
Avoided social functions	10%
Other health problems	6%

Importance of Oral Health

Question 9: In general, when compared with most people your age, how would you rate the health of your teeth and gums?

Excellent	11%
Very good	28%
Good	33%
Fair	19%
Poor	9%

Question 9A: How important do you think it is to have healthy teeth and gums?

Extremely important	56%
Very important	38%
Somewhat important	6%
Not very important	----
Not at all important	----

Question 10: How important do you think oral health (that is, the general health of your teeth and gums) is to one's overall general health? Would you say extremely important, very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?

Extremely important	47%
Very important	45%
Somewhat important	7%
Not very important	1%
Not at all important	----

Question 11: Would you say seeing a dentist regularly is more important, just as important, or less important than seeing a doctor or other health care professional regularly?

More important to see a dentist	10%
Just as important to see a dentist	80%
Less important to see a dentist	9%

Question 12: Do you agree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
Regular dental care at my age is important to prevent dental problems over time.	70%	22%	5%	2%	1%
It is just as easy for me to get dental care as medical care.	45%	24%	9%	12%	9%
I am embarrassed about the condition of my teeth.	12%	16%	15%	17%	40%

Question 13: Do you have all of your natural teeth, without any dentures or implants, or not?

Yes	52%
No	48%

Question 13A: [Among those with missing teeth] What type(s) of replacements do you have for your missing or damaged teeth? (n=738)

I have a combination of my own natural teeth and dentures	29%
I have full dentures	18%
I have a combination of my own natural teeth and dental implants	25%
I have a combination of dentures and dental implants	2%
I have missing teeth, no dentures or implants	23%

Health Insurance Coverage

Now I'd like to switch gears a bit and ask you a few questions about your health insurance coverage.

Question 13B: Do you have dental insurance coverage, or not?

Yes	59%
No	39%
Don't know	1%

Question 13C: [Among those with dental insurance] How do you get your dental insurance coverage?

As part of my health insurance	54%
As part of separate dental coverage	44%
Don't know	1%

Question 14: What is the source of your health insurance coverage?

Through my current employer	23%
Through my spouse's current employer	11%
Retiree benefit from my former employer	6%
Retiree benefit from my spouse's former employer	3%
Individually-purchased health insurance	9%
Medicaid	8%
Medicare	24%
Veterans' Administration / Military	3%
I do not have health insurance	----
Other	11%

Question 16A: [Among those who have separate dental coverage] How are you getting your dental insurance? (n=401)

Offered through employer	53%
Purchased on my own	20%
Through Medicaid	2%
Retiree health plan	8%
Offered through a former employer or spouse's former employer	9%
Other: please specify	7%

Question 16B: [Among those who have dental coverage] Do you typically have to pay any co-insurance, co-pay, or other out-of-pocket expenses when visiting the dentist, or not? (n=401)

Yes	67%
No	32%
Don't Know	1%

Question 16C: [Among those who have dental insurance and pays out-of-pocket] How do you typically pay for the expenses not covered by your [health/dental] insurance when visiting the dentist? [n=604]

With cash or a check	46%
With a flexible spending account through work	12%
With my savings	3%
With a credit card	30%
Through a health care financing plan	4%
Other: [insert text box]	5%

Question 17: [Among those who do not have dental insurance and pays out-of-pocket] If you need dental care, how do you usually pay for it? [n=632]

With cash or a check	54%
With a flexible spending account through work	2%
With my savings	5%
With a credit card	26%
Through a health care financing plan	5%
Other: [insert text box]	8%
Don't Know	1%

Now we are going to focus on the cost of all your medical bills.

Question 18: How concerned are you, if at all, about being able to pay your health care bills during the next 12 months?

Extremely concerned	7%
Very concerned	11%
Somewhat concerned	27%
Not very concerned	28%
Not at all concerned	26%

Question 19: And what about your dental bills? How concerned are you, if at all, about being able to pay your dental bills during the next 12 months?

Extremely concerned	8%
Very concerned	12%
Somewhat concerned	22%
Not very concerned	27%
Not at all concerned	30%

Question 19A: [ONLY ASK IF AGE < 65] Do you think you will get dental insurance when you turn 65? (n=957)

Yes	43%
No	17%
Don't Know	40%

Question 20: [ONLY ASK IF AGE < 65 and believe they will get dental insurance when they turn 65] When you turn 65, how do you think you will get dental insurance to help you pay for dental expenses? (n=798)

Through basic Medicare	18%
Through Medicare Advantage	10%
Through retiree health benefits	9%
Through a Medigap plan	2%
Through Medicaid	5%
Purchase separate dental plan	12%
Won't have dental insurance(s)	1%
Don't know	42%

Question 20A: As you may know, Medicare does not cover most dental care, dental procedures, or supplies, like cleanings, fillings, tooth extractions, dentures, dental plates, or other dental devices. Would you support or oppose a law that would add a dental benefit to Medicare if your costs would increase?

Support	66%
Oppose	13%
Don't Know	20%

Question 21: [Among those who support adding a dental benefit or those who already have Medicare coverage]

As you may know, Medicare does not cover most dental care, dental procedures, or supplies, like cleanings, fillings, tooth extractions, dentures, dental plates, or other dental devices. Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) will pay for certain dental services that you get when you are in a hospital. Since routine dental coverage is not available under Original Medicare, you are generally responsible for the full cost of your dental care unless you have other dental insurance. (n=1,013)

What dental services would you like Medicare to cover? [Check all that apply.]

Teeth fillings or replacements (ie., fillings, crowns, and/or bridges)	87%
Gum treatments	67%
Dentures or dental implants	74%
Teeth cleaning	79%
Teeth whitening	24%
Pain relief	61%
Work to improve appearance (ie., braces or bonding)	27%
None/Nothing	1%

Demographics

[Panel Question] Have you ever served on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, military Reserves, or National Guard?

Yes	16%
No	84%

[Panel Question] Are you currently on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces, military Reserves, or National Guard? [n=249]

Yes	4%
No	71%
[Information missing from panel]	25%

[Panel Question] Residence Category

Urban	73%
Suburban	10%
Rural	18%

D1. How old are you? _____

45-54	31%
55-64	31%
65+	38%

D2. Are you male or female?

Male	47%
Female	53%

D3. What is your current marital status?

Married	54%
Not married, living with your partner or significant other	4%
Separated	2%
Divorced	18%
Widowed	11%
Currently single and never married	11%

D4. [IF D3 = 1 ASK: "Are you or your spouse currently a member of A-A-R-P?" IF D3 = 2 ASK: "Are you or your partner currently a member of A-A-R-P?" OTHERWISE ASK "Are you currently a member of A-A-R-P?"]

Yes	34%
No	65%

D5. In general, when compared to most people your age, how would you rate your health?

Excellent	12%
Very good	34%
Good	36%
Fair	14%
Poor	5%

D6. Are you of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino origin or descent?

Yes	12%
No	88%

D7. What is your race? You may select more than one.

Hispanic	12%
White, non-Hispanic	70%
Black, non-Hispanic	11%
Asian, non-Hispanic	1%
Other, non-Hispanic	2%
2 or more races, non-Hispanic	3%

D8. Which one of the following best describes your employment status?

Employed full-time	46%
Employed part-time	
Retired and not working at all	34%
Unemployed, and looking for work	
Not in the labor force for other reasons	

D9. Which best describes the highest level of education you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

0-12 years, but with no diploma	10%
High school graduate or equivalent (e.g., GED)	31%
Post high school education, but with no degree	18%
Two-year college degree (e.g. associate's degree)	7%
Four-year college degree (e.g., B.A., B.S.)	19%
Graduate or professional degree (e.g., M.S., M.D., Ph.D.)	14%

D10. Finally, just for statistical purposes, please tell me is your current annual HOUSEHOLD income, before taxes?

Less than \$30,000	28%
\$30,000 to \$59,999	25%
\$60,000 to \$99,999	24%
\$100,000 or more	21%