



Decay in Access

Barriers to Oral Health Care Remain in Colorado

Good oral health is essential to overall health and well-being. Yet according to findings from the Colorado Health Access Survey, almost one out of five Coloradans (17.6%) reported fair or poor oral health in 2023. This was an increase of 0.5 percentage points from 2021 but less of an increase when compared to poor mental health (up 2.5 percentage points) and poor general health (up 2.0 percentage points) across the state. See Figure 1.

Almost three quarters of Coloradans (74.3%) saw a dentist or dental hygienist in the last 12 months. This was an increase from 2021 (67.1%) and surpassed pre-pandemic levels (73.6%). See Figure 2. Colorado fared better than the national average: 65.2% of adults received dental care in the past 12 months.

About the Data

All Colorado-specific data in this report are from the **Colorado Health Access Survey (CHAS)**, which captures information on health coverage, access to care, and the factors that influence health. The 2023 CHAS was fielded from March to September. Roughly 10,000 randomly selected households in the state have participated every other year since 2009, allowing comparisons across time.

National data are taken from the **Centers for Disease Control's National Health Interview Survey**. The oral health care statistics provide similar information, but questions differ from those in the CHAS, and data is unavailable from 2021.

Figure 1. More Coloradans Reported Poor Health in 2023 Than in 2021

Percentage reporting general, mental, and oral health status, 2021-2023

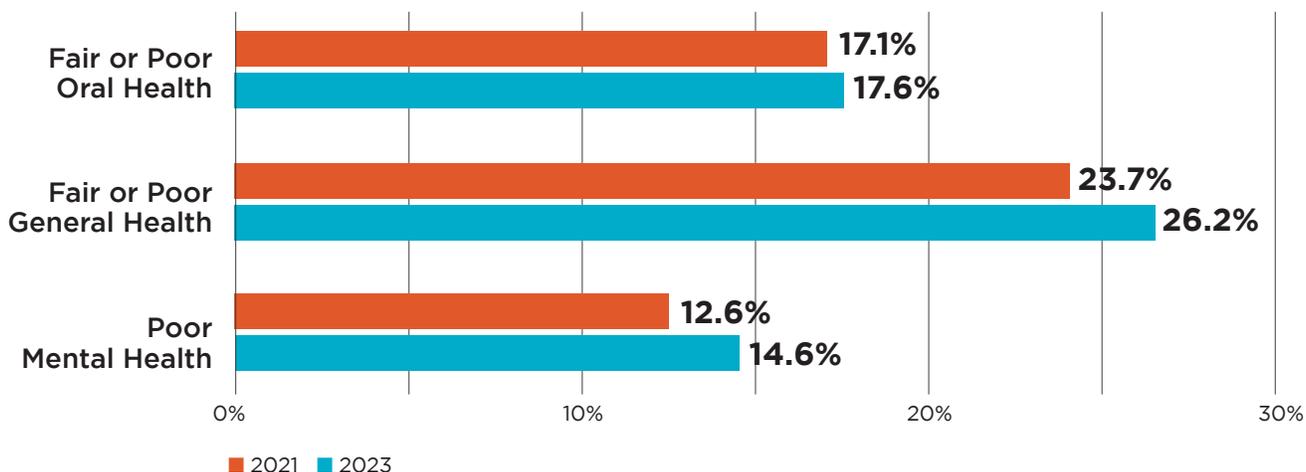
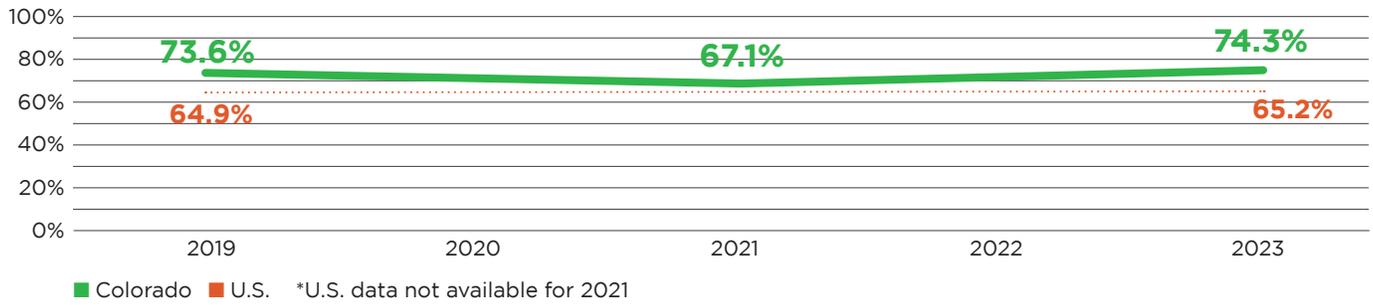


Figure 2. Dental Visits Surpassed Pre-Pandemic Levels in 2023

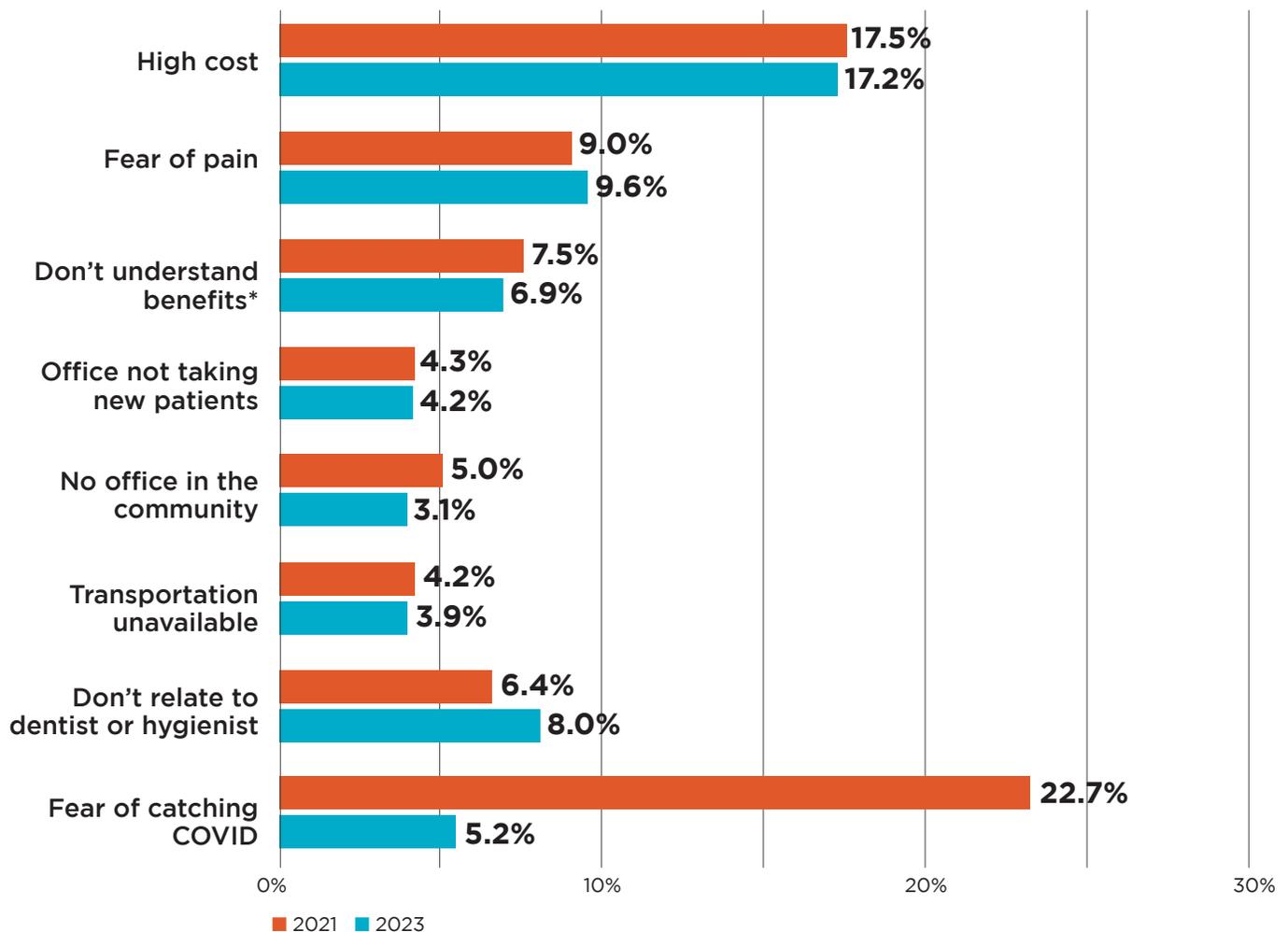
Percentage of Coloradans who saw a dentist or dental hygienist in the last 12 months, 2019-2023



High cost (17.2%), fear of pain (9.6%), and not understanding their dental benefits (6.9%) were among the most frequently reported barriers to oral health access that impacted Coloradans in 2023. An office not taking new patients and a lack of transportation affected fewer people with no real change in access from 2021 to 2023. See Figure 3.

Figure 3. Coloradans Experienced Many Barriers to Accessing Oral Health Care In 2021 and 2023

Percentage experiencing barriers to accessing oral health care, 2021-2023



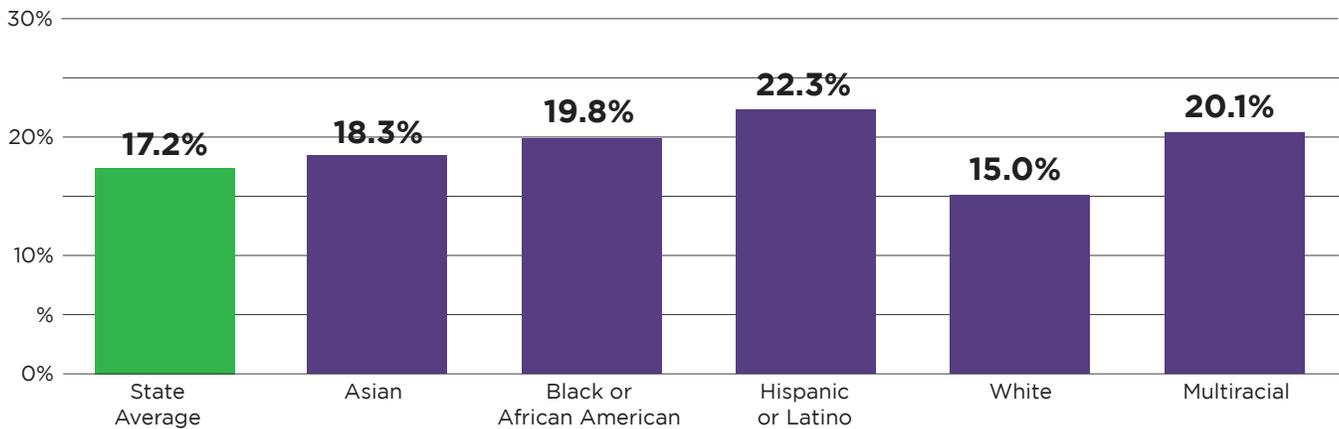
* Most survey responses were recorded before the end of the COVID-19 [Public Health Emergency](#) on May 11, 2023. It is likely that many Coloradans did not know this could change their Medicaid eligibility.

Many people of color in Colorado did not get dental care when they needed it in 2023 due to cost. Hispanic or Latino (22.3%), Black or African American (19.8%), and multiracial Coloradans (20.1%) were especially impacted. See Figure 4.

Cost remained a barrier, regardless of household income. But when people do not qualify for Medicaid and make less than \$111,000 – 400% of the federal poverty level (FPL) for a family of four – cost becomes a greater barrier. See Figure 5.

Figure 4. Cost Was a Bigger Barrier to Oral Health Care for Hispanic and Black Coloradans

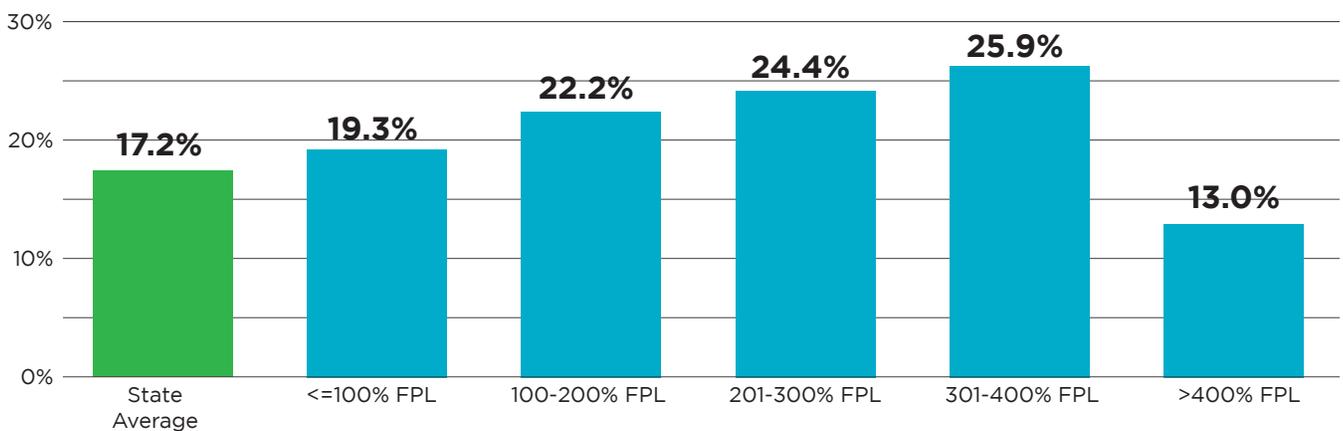
Percentage not getting needed dental care because of cost by race/ethnicity,* 2023



* American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander identities are also captured on the survey, but due to sample size, estimates for these populations were not reportable.

Figure 5. Cost Was the Greatest Barrier for Households Earning Lower Incomes

Percentage not getting needed dental care because of cost by income, 2023



Many Coloradans were confused about their dental benefits in 2023. Those covered by Medicaid (13.5%) more often reported not understanding benefits as a barrier. See Figure 6.

Some people of color in Colorado feared the pain of procedures they anticipated when going to the dentist. The variation across race/ethnicity highlights the importance of culturally competent care, understanding the distrust of health care, and creating community relationships. See Figure 7.

Figure 6. Medicaid Clients Were Twice as Likely To Report Not Understanding Their Benefits as the State Average

Percentage who didn't get needed dental care because they didn't understand their dental benefits by insurance type, 2023

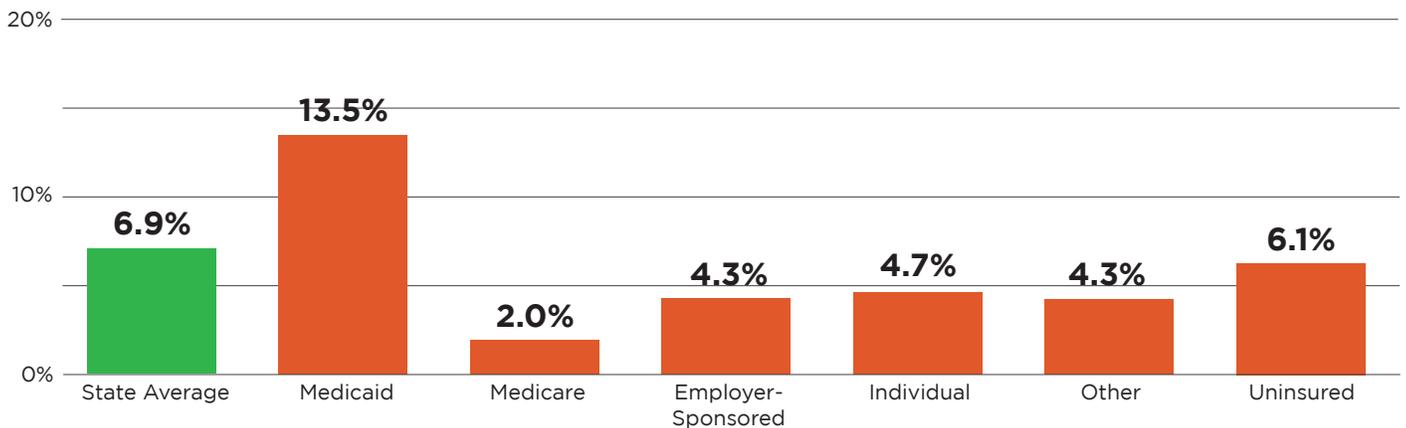
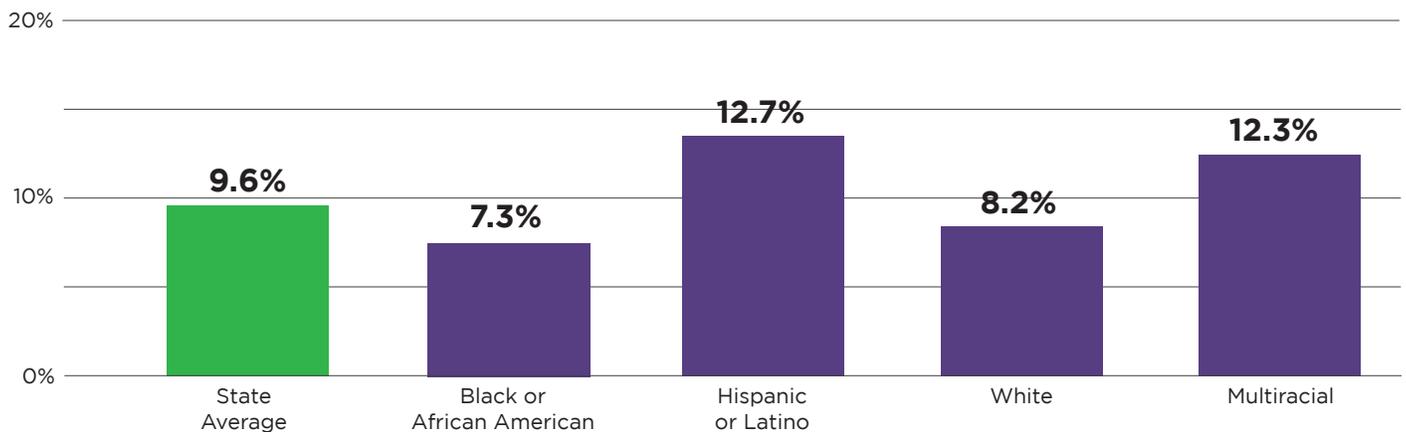


Figure 7. Not Getting Oral Health Care for Fear of Pain Presents the Greatest Hurdle for Hispanic and Multiracial Coloradans

Percentage who didn't get needed dental care because they were afraid of pain from procedures the dentist would perform by race/ethnicity,* 2023



* Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander identities are also captured on the survey, but due to sample size, estimates for these populations were not reportable.