

# Rural Oral Health

Oral health is interconnected to overall health, meaning that poor oral health can lead to various health problems. Heart disease, diabetes, and other conditions are closely linked to oral health. **In rural areas, residents face many barriers to accessing and receiving proper oral health services:**

- **67% of rural areas are considered dental Health Professional Shortage Areas.**
- **Employers in rural areas are less likely to offer dental insurance than employers in urban areas.**
- **Rural children have poorer dental health outcomes and are less likely to receive preventive dental care than urban children.**
- **34% of rural residents do not have dental insurance coverage, compared to 29% of urban residents.**
- **40% rural adults have not visited the dentist in more than 1 year compared to 35% of urban adults.**
- **34% of individuals living in a rural environment rate their oral health as fair or poor, compared with 27% of urban residents.**

## NRHA's oral health priorities include:

- **Addressing Rural Declining Life Expectancy and Rural Health Opportunity**
  - Increasing fluoride access, Veteran's access to oral health, and affordability
- **Reducing Rural Health Care Workforce Shortages**
  - Incentivizing provider recruitment and increasing scope of practice for mid-level providers
- **Investing in a Strong Rural Safety Net**
  - Establishing full Medicare coverage of dental services, comprehensive Medicaid adult benefit in all states, and modernizing dental care delivery

# NRHA Supported Legislation

## **S. 1164/H.R. 1397: Increasing Access to Dental Insurance Act**

*Sens. Hassan (D-NH), Marshall (R-KS), Coons (D-DE), Tillis (R-NC), Curtis (R-UT), Shaheen (D-NH), Grassley (R-IA), & Peters (D-MI), Capito (R-WV), & Reps. Miller Meeks (R-IA) & Dingell (R-MI)*

Allow Standalone Dental Plans offered through Federal Exchanges.

## **S. 939/H.R. 2045: Medicare Dental, Hearing, and Vision Expansion Act of 2025**

*Sens. Sanders (I-VT) & Reps. Doggett (D-TX)*

Provides comprehensive Medicare coverage of dental benefits.

## **H.R. 935: Health Care Workforce Innovation Act**

*Reps. Garbarino (R-NY), Schrier (D-WA), Valadao (R-CA), Craig (D-MN)*

Establishes and expands partnerships between Community Health Centers (CHCs) and educational institutions to attract students to health professions, including careers in oral health.

## **S. 942/H.R. 2028: Resident Education Deferred Interest (REDI) Act**

*Sens. Rosen (D-NV), Boozman (R-AR) & Reps. Babin (R-TX), Houlahan (D-PA)*

Allows medical and dental students to defer student loan payments until after completion of residency programs.

## **Sen. 1080/H.R. 1758: Dental Loan Repayment Assistance Act**

*Sens. Durbin (D-IL) & Wicker (R-MS) & Reps. Van Drew (R-NJ), Clarke (D-NY)*

Allows all veterans enrolled in the VA health care system to be eligible for VA-provided dental services.

## **H.R. 2001: Reauthorize dental workforce programs**

*Reps. Kelly (D-IL), Simpson (R-ID)*

Reauthorizes grants at the Health Resources and Services Administration to support oral health workforce activities and help states develop and implement innovative programs to address the dental workforce shortages in Health Professional Shortage Areas.