

National Rural Health Association

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other states?



The National Rural Oral Health Initiative

The National Rural Oral Health Initiative, a collaboration between the National Rural Health Association and the CareQuest Institute, aims to address oral health disparities in rural America. Proudly entering Year 6 of the initiative.

The collaborative efforts prioritize Policy, Communications, Education, and Research to raise awareness and prioritize person-centered care. This initiative aims to improve access to quality oral health care in rural communities and connect groups with necessary resources for patient assistance.

Status of Oral Care in Tennessee

88.3%

of the Tennessee population is served by community water systems that have fluoridated water.

This ranks Tennessee **16th out of 50** states for community water fluoridation, giving it the 35th lowest rate in the nation

There are 1 public and 2 private dental schools in the state of Tennessee

The State of Tennessee DOES NOT mandate water fluoridation.

59.7%

of adults ages 18+ have visited a dentist or dental clinic in 2025.

Medicaid
42.0%

of children in Tennessee are covered by Medicaid/CHIP

92.7%

of all eligible children participate in Medicaid/CHIP.

22.8%

of the Tennessee population is covered by Medicaid/CHIP.

All preventive dental services including cleanings, fluoride treatments, sealants, and space maintainers are covered for children under Medicaid, with age and tooth specific limits. Dental exams and X rays are covered, but oral health screenings and risk assessments are not.

NRHA Rural Oral Policy Objectives

- NRHA supports targeted federal and state action to expand fluoride access and SDF utilization, invest in comprehensive dental coverage for rural veterans, prioritization of preventative care services, and strengthen rural oral health research capacity to inform effective policy solutions.
- NRHA supports federal efforts to expand the allied-health professional network and dental workforce through community-based organizations, federally recognize mid-level providers, and improve loan deferment and repayment programs. Rural health care workforce shortages can be enhanced through additional investments in rural oral health training programs.
- NRHA encourages expansion of Medicare and Medicaid programs to include oral health coverage. Investing in a strong rural health safety net bolsters economies and ensures comprehensive coverage.
- NRHA encourages data transparency within Medicare Advantage plans and the enhancement of oral health care delivery in rural areas using remote technology.

