

ORAL HEALTH IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

Needs Assessment Update
December 2025



LIVE WELL
SAN DIEGO

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County of San Diego Local Oral Health Program

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[https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/
phs/dental_health_initiative_share_the_care.html](https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/dental_health_initiative_share_the_care.html)

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Summary

This needs assessment is an update from 2019 and summarizes data on population demographics, oral health behaviors and outcomes, and community supports and assets for San Diego County. Findings from local community health needs assessments, population surveys, utilization data, and Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment data were compiled. County-level findings are summarized below:

Access to Dental Care in San Diego County

- Over 200,000 San Diego County residents live in areas experiencing a shortage of dentists for Medi-Cal-eligible and low-income populations, 65% of which are underserved.
- Lack of access to dental care and dental insurance disproportionately impacts Black and Latino populations.
- About 400,000 residents are estimated to be impacted by state and federal changes to Medi-Cal.

Oral Health in San Diego County, by Population Group

- Despite the recommendation that children visit the dentist by age 1, 23% of San Diego County children aged 1-4 have never been to the dentist.
- Based on 2024-2025 Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment data, tooth decay and urgent dental care needs were higher among students entering schools in low-income communities.
- Though most (89%) foster youth received a timely dental exam in 2024-2025, there is a need to link transitional youth aged 17-21 in foster care to a dental home.
- According to 2023-2024 survey data, nearly a third (30%) of adults with a disability did not have dental insurance.
- The majority (54%) of women with Medi-Cal with a recent live birth did not receive a dental visit during pregnancy in 2022-2023.
- The majority (72%) of seniors with Medi-Cal did not receive an annual dental visit in 2023.

Supports for Community Oral Health

- In 2024, 2.9 million San Diego County residents had access to fluoridated water.
- Registered Dental Hygienists in Alternative Practice (RDHAPs) and school-based oral health programs address oral health disparities by reducing barriers to accessing dental care and preventive services.
- Examples of collaborative efforts to improve oral health in San Diego County include the Senior Oral Health Partnership and the San Diego County Oral Health Coalition.

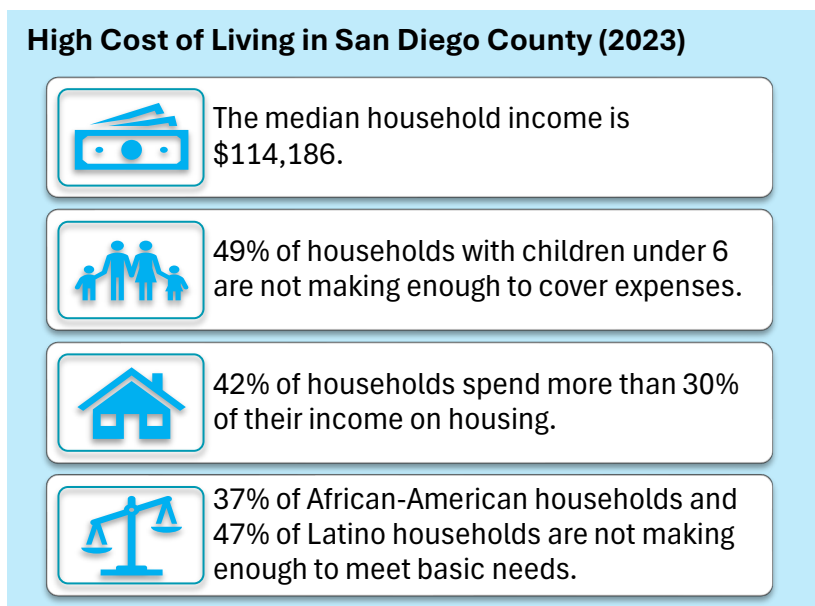
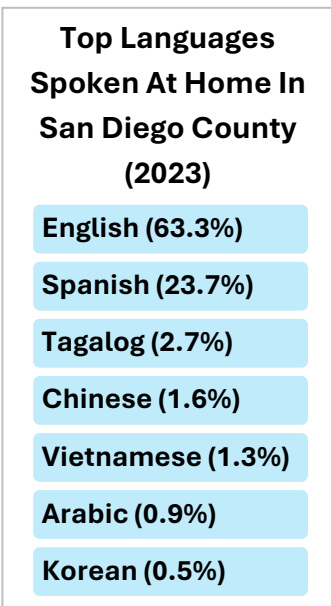
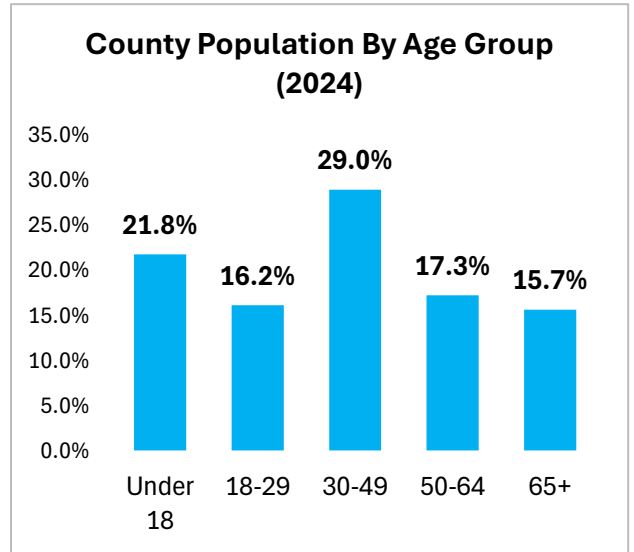
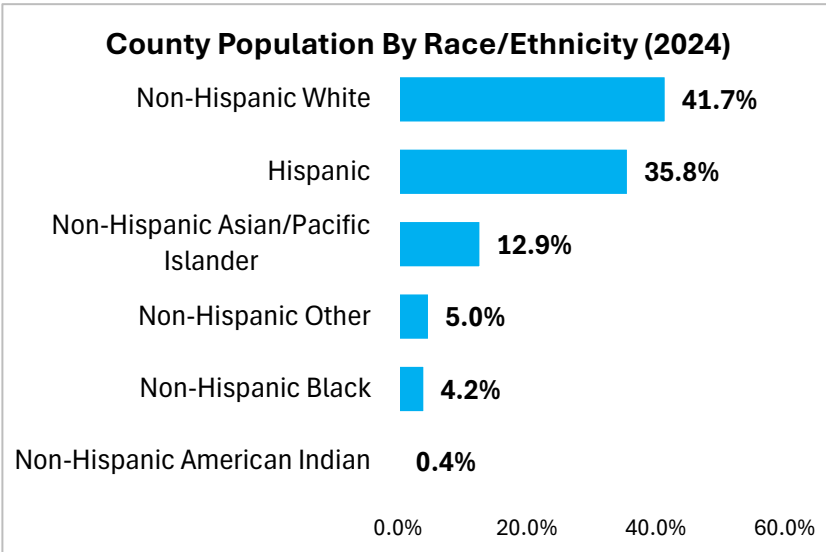
This information will be used to inform the development of a community oral health improvement plan. Oral health professionals and community organizations interested in collaboration are encouraged to visit the [San Diego County Oral Health Coalition website](#) for information on upcoming meetings, resources, main contacts, and online discussions.

Updates for some oral health data included in the 2019 Needs Assessment are summarized in Appendix B. Appendix B also compares findings from the 2018 and 2024 Dental Provider Surveys.

Demographics

San Diego County population count¹, race/ethnicity¹, age¹, language², disability², and cost of living³ data are summarized below. Detailed demographic data for San Diego County at smaller geographies can be found on the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency Community Health Statistics Unit’s [Demographic and Regional Data webpage](#).⁴

County Total Population (2024): 3,315,362



¹ San Diego Association of Governments. (2025). *2024 Population and Housing Estimates*. <https://opendata.sandag.org/stories/s/SANDAG-Estimates-PDF-Reports/mire-zdsi/>

² County of San Diego, Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health Statistics Unit. (2025). *San Diego County 2019-2023 Region/Subregional Area (SRA) Demographic Profiles* [Dashboard]. https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/chsu/viz/2023RegionandSRADemographicProfiles_17441364742510/HomePage

³ United Ways of California. (2025). *The Real Cost Measure in California 2025* [Dashboard]. <https://unitedwaysca.org/realcost/>

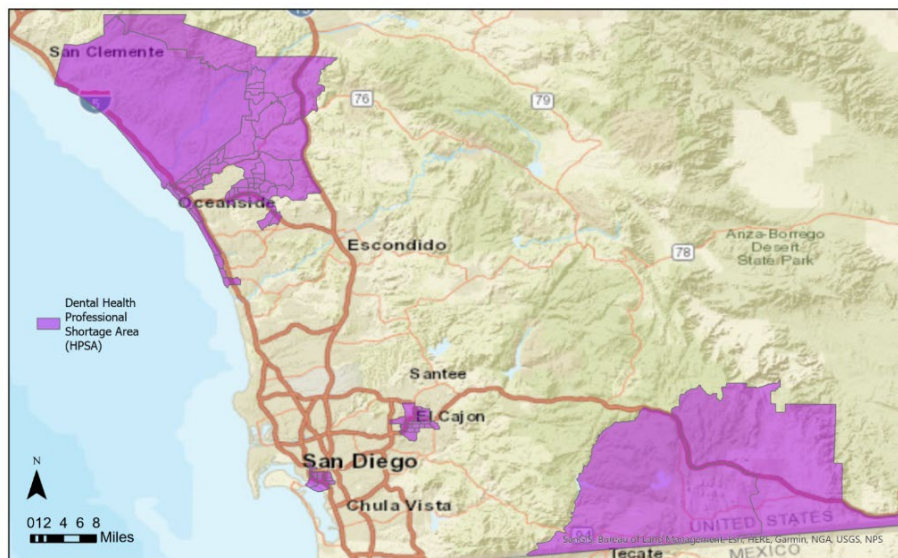
⁴ County of San Diego, Health and Human Services Agency, Public Health Services, Community Health Statistics Unit. *Demographic and Regional Data*. https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_health_statistics/regional-community-data.html#dems

Access to Dental Care in San Diego County

Dental health and access to dental services have consistently been identified in local community health needs assessments as top health concerns in San Diego County.⁵ Costs and copays, lack of time, and insurance denials have been reported as primary barriers to residents maintaining good oral health, with some crossing the border into Mexico for more affordable dental care and quicker appointments.

In San Diego County, there was one dentist per 990 people in 2023.⁶ Both urban and rural areas of the county have a shortage of dentists for Medi-Cal-eligible and low-income populations (Fig. 1). Of over 200,000 residents living in Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) in Oceanside, San Marcos, Vista, Encinitas, El Cajon, Fallbrook, San Diego (city), Campo, and Jacumba, nearly two-thirds (65%) are estimated to be underserved.⁷

Fig. 1. Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas in San Diego County, 2025



Source: HRSA, Bureau of Health Workforce (BHW), Division of Policy and Shortage Designation (DPSD). Exported November 2025.

There were over 800 Medi-Cal Dental Fee-For-Service providers in San Diego County that saw Medi-Cal beneficiaries for an annual dental visit, preventive service, treatment, or exam in 2024.⁸ Of over 1 million San Diego County residents on Medi-Cal in 2023, only a third received an annual dental visit that year.⁹

Based on 2024 survey data, it is estimated over 500,000 San Diego County residents do not have dental insurance, 60,000 children have used free dental care programs, and 37,000 adults received dental services at free events the previous year.¹⁰

These data indicate a need for more dental providers willing to see Medi-Cal patients and improved access to free and affordable dental services in underserved communities.

⁵ Hospital Association of San Diego & Imperial Counties. (2019, 2022, 2025). *San Diego Community Health Needs Assessments*.

<https://hasdic.org/chna/>

⁶ County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. (2025). *Dentists*.

<https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/community-conditions/health-infrastructure/clinical-care/dentists?year=2025&county=06073>

⁷ Health Resources & Services Administration, Bureau of Health Workforce (BHW), Division of Policy and Shortage Designation (DPSD). (2025). *Shortage Areas* [Dataset]. HRSA Data Warehouse. <https://data.hrsa.gov/data/download>

⁸ California Department of Health Care Services, Medi-Cal Dental Services Division. (2025). *Dental Utilization By Provider* (Calendar Year 2024) [Dataset]. CalHHS. <https://data.chhs.ca.gov/dataset/dental-utilization-per-provider>

⁹ California Department of Health Care Services, Medi-Cal Dental Services Division. (2025). *Dental Utilization Measures and Sealant Data by County and Age* (Calendar Year 2023) [Dataset]. CalHHS. <https://data.chhs.ca.gov/dataset/test-dhcs-utilization-measures-and-sealant-data-by-county-calendar-year-2013-to-2021>

¹⁰ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. AskCHIS 2024 (San Diego). <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/askchis>

Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Dental Care Access

Lack of access to dental care and insurance coverage contributes to racial/ethnic inequities in oral health.¹¹ In San Diego County, Black people had the highest visit rate to hospital emergency departments (EDs) for non-traumatic dental conditions (NTDCs) in 2022-2023 compared to all other race/ethnicity groups (Fig. 2).¹² According to 2023-2024 survey data, 37% of Black adults and 32% of Latino adults in San Diego County did not visit the dentist in the past year, compared to 26% of Asian adults and 21% of White adults.¹³ One in three Latino adults in San Diego County is estimated to not have dental insurance. There is a need to address systemic racism and implement solutions to make strides towards oral health equity, such as value-based care payment models, medical-dental integration in electronic health systems, and promoting diversity in dentistry through student loan forgiveness programs for dentists from underrepresented communities.¹⁴

Fiscal and Policy Impacts on Medi-Cal

The California Legislature enacted a series of Medi-Cal reductions in June 2025, and Congress enacted bill H.R. 1 in July 2025, making many changes to federal Medicaid policy. Potentially one million people across the state are estimated to lose Medi-Cal due to new work requirements, which will also limit access to employer-sponsored coverage.¹⁵ Starting July 2026, Medi-Cal Dental benefits will no longer be provided to Medi-Cal members aged 19 and older who do not meet California's Satisfactory Immigration Status definition, with exceptions for emergency dental care and dental benefits during pregnancy.¹⁶

In San Diego County, it is estimated that new work requirements will affect 327,000 people on Medi-Cal, and 75,000 immigrants will lose Medi-Cal access starting October 2026.¹⁷ There is a need to mitigate the impact of these additional barriers to dental care, especially for groups most affected by state and federal policy changes, highlighting the importance of local collaborations to support community oral health.

¹¹ CareQuest Institute for Oral Health. (2022). *The Glaring Scope of Racial Disparities in Oral Health*. <https://www.carequest.org/resource-library/glaring-scope-racial-disparities-oral-health>

¹² California Department of Public Health Office of Oral Health. (2025). *Emergency Department Visits for Non-Traumatic Dental Conditions by Race 2022-2023* [Dataset]. HCAI ED visit data, 2022-2023.

¹³ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. AskCHIS 2023-2024 (San Diego). <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/askchis>

¹⁴ Fleming, E., Burgette, J., Lee, H. H., Buscemi, J., & Smith, P. D. Oral Health Equity Cannot Be Achieved Without Racial Equity. *Health Affairs Forefront*. <https://doi.org/10.1377/forefront.20220420.398180>

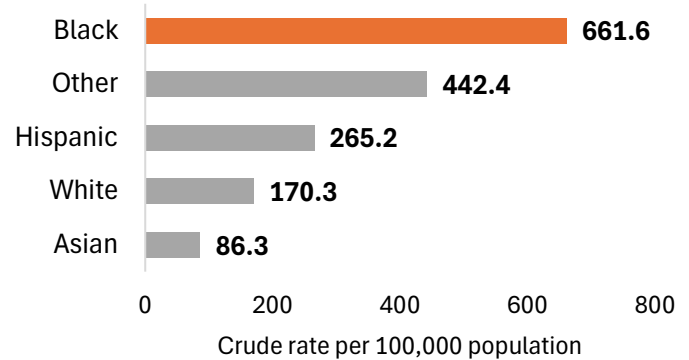
¹⁵ Legislative Analyst's Office, The California Legislature's Nonpartisan Fiscal and Policy Advisor. (2025, October). *Considering Medi-Cal in the Midst of a Changing Fiscal and Policy Landscape*. <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/5083>

¹⁶ California Department of Health Care Services. (2025). *Medi-Cal Program Changes (2026-2027)*. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/services/medi-cal/eligibility/Pages/medi-cal-changes.aspx>

¹⁷ Kincaid, J. (2025, July 25). *San Diego County estimates 400,000 Medi-Cal, CalFresh recipients could lose benefits*. KPBS.

<https://www.kpbs.org/news/health/2025/07/25/san-diego-county-estimates-400-000-medi-cal-calfresh-recipients-could-lose-benefits>

Fig. 2. 2022-2023 ED Visit Rate for NTDCs in San Diego County, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) Emergency Department (ED) visit data, 2022-2023.

Oral Health, by Population Group

Children Aged 0-5

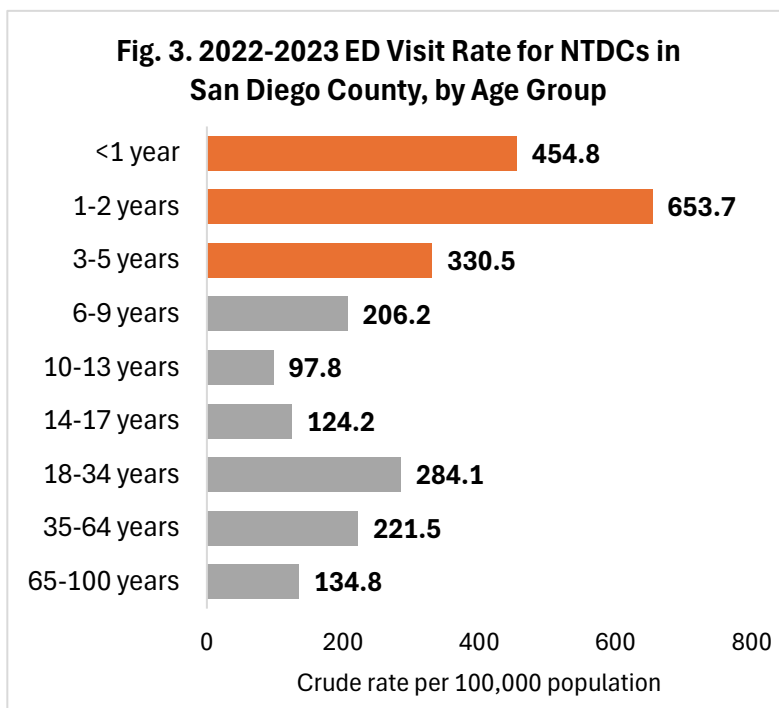
Dental caries is the most common chronic childhood disease, and untreated dental disease can lead to pain, difficulty eating, and infection. Children should receive their first dental visit no later than age 1 for early prevention and identification of dental disease.¹⁸

Caregivers may not be aware of the recommendation to take their child to the dentist by age 1 or understand the importance of the age-one dental visit. According to 2023-2024 survey data, 23% of San Diego County children aged 1-4 were estimated to have never been to the dentist.¹⁹ The main reasons reported were because there was “no reason to go/no problem” and the child was “not old enough.”

Families with limited access to dental care often resort to visiting the ED for dental issues best addressed in a dental setting. In 2022-2023, San Diego County children aged 0-5 had the highest rates of ED visits for NTDCs compared to all other age groups (Fig. 3).²⁰

Nationally, children who visit the ED for NTDCs have been shown to be more likely to be uninsured or covered by Medicaid and from lower-income families.²¹ In 2023, less than a third (30%) of San Diego County children aged 2 and under with Medi-Cal received a dental visit.²² Every year past age 1 that dental visits are delayed, dental disease is more likely to require surgical intervention.¹⁸ In San Diego County, 1 in 5 children aged 3-5 with Medi-Cal received dental treatment services and 16% received restorative services in 2023.²²

These data indicate a need to increase linkages to pediatric dental providers and awareness about Medi-Cal-covered services for children aged 0-5 and the importance of the first dental visit by first birthday.



Source: California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) Emergency Department (ED) visit data, 2022-2023.

¹⁸ Baker, S. D., Lee, J. Y., Wright R. (2019). *The Importance of the Age One Dental Visit*. Pediatric Oral Health Research and Policy Center, American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. [year1visit.pdf](#)

¹⁹ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. AskCHIS 2023-2024 (San Diego). <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/askchis>

²⁰ California Department of Public Health Office of Oral Health. (2025). *Emergency Department Visits for Non-Traumatic Dental Conditions by Age 2022-2023* [Dataset]. HCAI ED visit data, 2022-2023.

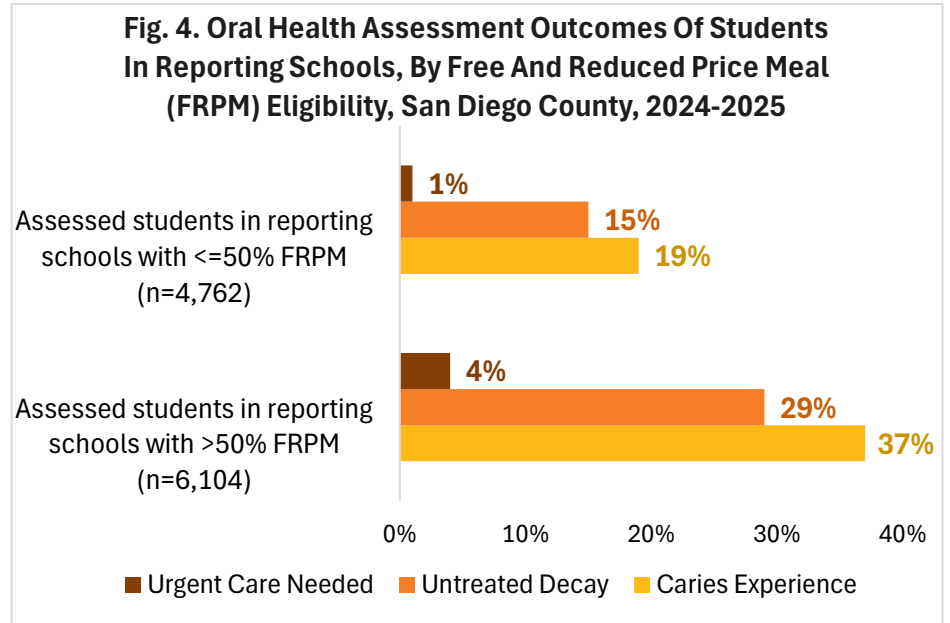
²¹ Kim, P. C., Zhou, W., McCoy, S. J., McDonough, I. K., Burston, B., Ditmyer, M., & Shen, J. J. (2019). Factors Associated with Preventable Emergency Department Visits for Nontraumatic Dental Conditions in the U.S. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 16(19), 3671. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16193671>

²² California Department of Health Care Services, Medi-Cal Dental Services Division. (2025). *Dental Utilization Measures and Sealant Data by County and Age* (Calendar Year 2023) [Dataset]. CalHHS. <https://data.chhs.ca.gov/dataset/test-dhcs-utilization-measures-and-sealant-data-by-county-calendar-year-2013-to-2021>

School-Aged Children

Dental problems hurt children’s ability to learn, leading to missed school days and poor academic performance. Statewide, 869,202 school days were missed in 2021 due to dental problems, costing school districts an estimated \$60 million.²³ According to 2024 survey data, 1 in 10 San Diego County children aged 5-17 missed at least one school day in the past year due to dental problems.²⁴

The Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA) requirement passed into California law in 2005, requiring all children entering public school to have a KOHA. The law also requires schools and districts to collect the KOHA forms and report data annually. Data reported by 282 schools across San Diego County for over 10,000 students in 2024-2025 showed 23% had untreated decay.²⁵ Tooth decay and urgent dental care needs were higher among assessed students entering schools in low-income communities (Fig. 4).



Source: 2024-2025 San Diego County Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment Data

In San Diego County, over half (53%) of children aged 6-18 on Medi-Cal received an annual dental visit in 2023, and only 13% of those aged 6-14 received sealants.²⁶ According to the 2025 Community Health Needs Assessment by Rady Children’s Hospital San Diego, parents reported challenges when seeking dental care for their children, such as difficulty finding trusted dentists that accept Medi-Cal Dental, hesitation to take children out of school for dental care, and children’s fear of the dentist.²⁷ Mobile health care visits were viewed positively by community members as an effective way to receive routine preventive care, such as dental screenings and fluoride varnish application, as children felt comfortable receiving care at schools and community centers. These data indicate a need to improve access to Medi-Cal Dental pediatric providers, expand onsite screenings and preventive services, and create linkages between schools and local dental providers for dental care coordination.

²³ California Department of Public Health. Center for Healthy Communities and Office of Oral Health. (2024). *Children’s Oral Health Matters for School Success*. <https://oralhealthsupport.ucsf.edu/media/8336>

²⁴ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. AskCHIS 2024 (San Diego). <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/askchis>

²⁵ 2024-2025 Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (San Diego) [Dataset]. <https://www.ab1433.org/home/overview>

²⁶ California Department of Health Care Services, Medi-Cal Dental Services Division. (2025). *Dental Utilization Measures and Sealant Data by County and Age (Calendar Year 2023)* [Dataset]. CalHHS. <https://data.chhs.ca.gov/dataset/test-dhcs-utilization-measures-and-sealant-data-by-county-calendar-year-2013-to-2021>

²⁷ Rady Children’s Hospital San Diego. (2025). *2025 Community Health Needs Assessment*. <https://www.rchsd.org/documents/2025/07/2025-community-health-needs-assessment-report.pdf/>

Foster Youth

Foster youth typically have a high prevalence of chronic dental or oral health problems upon entering foster care, have often only received sporadic dental care prior to foster care, and can encounter significant barriers to oral health care, such as challenges obtaining consent for needed dental care.^{28,29} According to 2024-2025 SafeMeasures® data, over 89% of children aged 1-17 in out-of-home placement in San Diego County received a timely dental exam.³⁰ Of over 300 transition-aged (17-21) foster youth in San Diego County, 18% had a documented dental visit in the past year. As youth age out of foster care, they are more likely to encounter challenges with finances, housing, continuing education, and employment, indicating a need for linkage to self-sufficiency resources and support, including dental insurance and a dental home.

People with Special Health Care Needs

Special health care needs (SHCN) are defined by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry as any physical, developmental, mental, sensory, behavioral, cognitive, or emotional impairment or limiting condition requiring medical management, health care intervention, and/or specialized services or programs.³¹ According to 2023-2024 survey data, 30% of San Diego County adults disabled due to a physical, mental, or emotional condition do not have dental insurance, compared to 23% of non-disabled adults (Fig. 5.).³² About two-thirds (68%) of disabled adults in San Diego County received a dental visit in the past year, compared to 77% of non-disabled adults (Fig. 5).

Community-based, nonprofit regional centers can facilitate dental care access through care coordination. Survey data from 2022-2023 of over 400 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities served by the San Diego Regional Center showed 83% had a routine dental exam in the past year.³³

²⁸ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2021). Oral Health Needs of Children in Foster Care. <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/foster-care/oral-health-needs-of-children-in-foster-care/>

²⁹ American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Policy on care for vulnerable populations in a pediatric dental setting. The Reference Manual of Pediatric Dentistry. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 2025:52-60. <https://www.aapd.org/research/oral-health-policies--recommendations/policy-on-care-for-vulnerable-populations-in-a-dental-setting/>

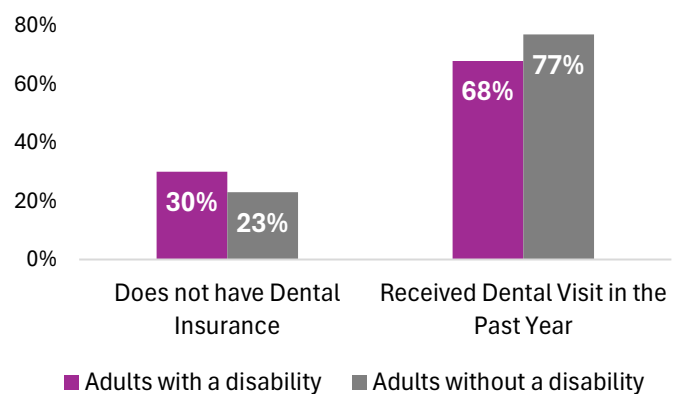
³⁰ County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency Child and Family Well-Being (CFWB) Data Unit. (2025). *Youth in Foster Care within FY24-25 and their most recent Dental Examination* [Dataset].

³¹ American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry. Management of dental patients with special health care needs. The Reference Manual of Pediatric Dentistry. American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry; 2025:364-71. <https://www.aapd.org/research/oral-health-policies--recommendations/special-health-care-needs/>

³² UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. AskCHIS 2023-2024 (San Diego). <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/askchis>

³³ California Department of Developmental Services. (2025). NCI-IDD In-Person Survey San Diego Regional Center Report Fiscal Year 2022-23 Report. <https://www.dds.ca.gov/rc/nci/>

Fig. 5. Lack of Dental Insurance and Dental Visit in the Past Year Among San Diego County Adults, by Disability Status, 2023-2024

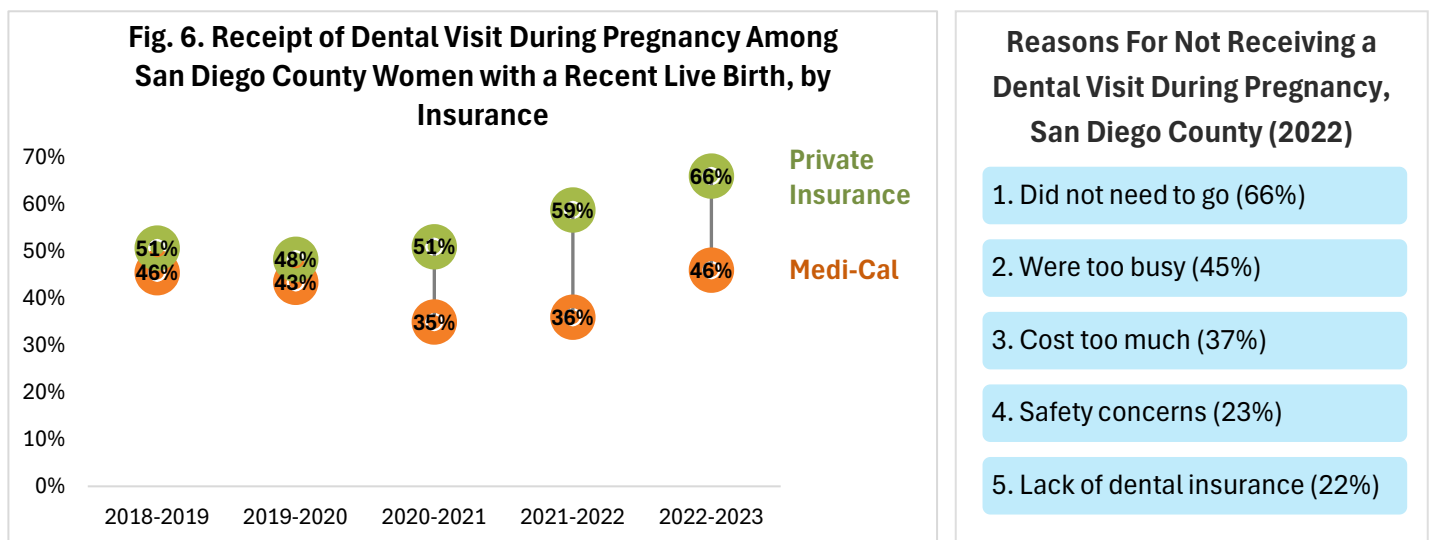


Source: 2023-2024 California Health Interview Survey

Pregnant Women

Periodontal diseases have been shown to be associated with adverse birth outcomes, such as preterm birth, preeclampsia, and low birth weight.³⁴ Though preventive, diagnostic, and restorative dental treatment is safe throughout pregnancy, many pregnant women do not receive a prenatal dental visit.

According to 2022-2023 survey data, 56% of San Diego County women with a recent live birth are estimated to have received a dental visit during pregnancy.³⁵ Less than half (46%) of women with Medi-Cal received a dental visit during pregnancy compared to two-thirds (66%) of women with private insurance (Fig. 6). There was also a significant gap in receiving a prenatal dental visit by maternal education level: 41% of women with a high school education or less received a dental visit during pregnancy compared to 66% of women who graduated from college. Of San Diego County women who did not receive a dental visit during pregnancy in 2022, two-thirds did not think they needed to visit the dentist and nearly one-fourth were concerned about safety.



Source: Maternal and Infant Health Assessment (MIHA)

These data indicate a need to promote the importance and safety of prenatal dental visits and increase awareness of dental services during pregnancy covered by Medi-Cal.

³⁴ Pockpa, Z. A. D., Soueidan, A., Koffi-Coulibaly, N. T., Limam, A., Badran, Z., and Struillou, X. (2021). Periodontal Diseases and Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes: Review of Two Decades of Clinical Research. *Oral Health and Preventive Dentistry*, 19(77-84). <https://doi.org/10.3290/j.ohpd.b898969>

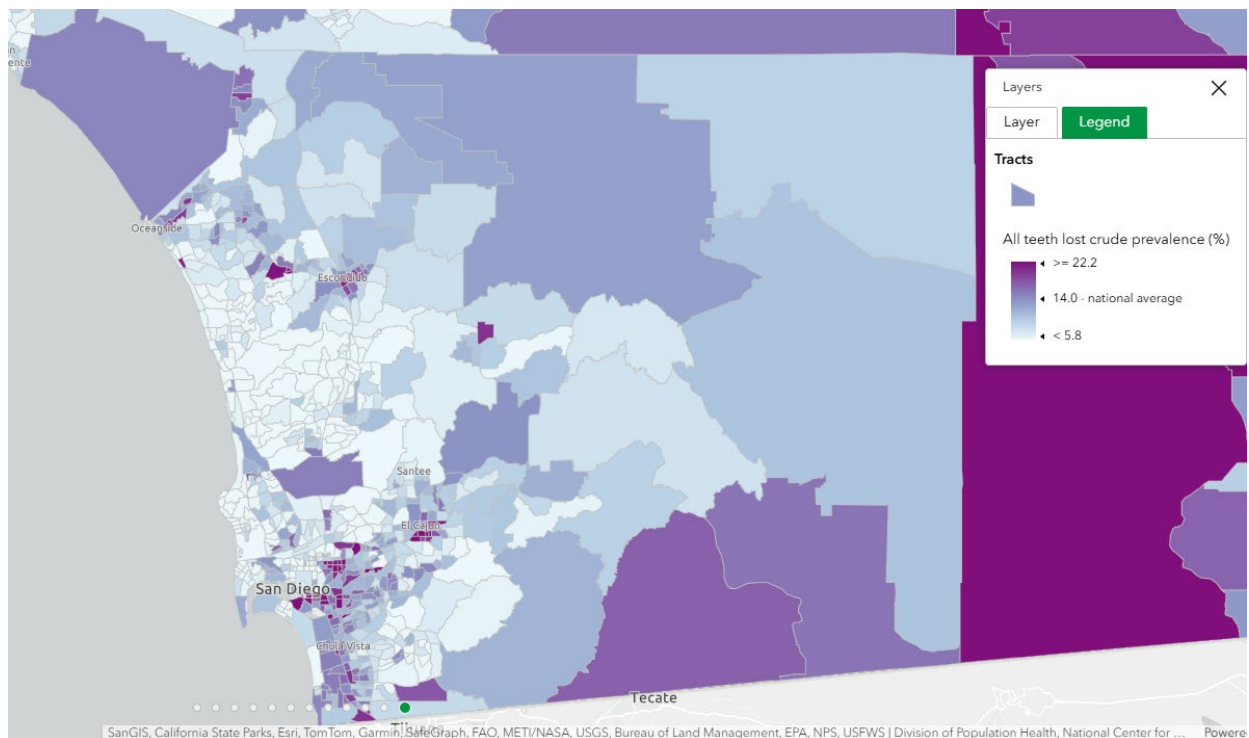
³⁵ California Department of Public Health, Center for Health Equity, University of California, San Francisco. (2025). *2022-2023 Maternal and Infant Health Assessment (MIHA)* [Dataset].

Seniors

As oral health conditions compound over the lifetime, older adults are at increased risk for oral diseases that can lead to weight loss and poor nutrition and exacerbate chronic conditions.³⁶ Older adults experience significant challenges accessing dental care, including costs, insurance coverage, finding providers that can accommodate special health care needs, and transportation. About 1 in 3 (36%) older adults aged 65+ in San Diego County are estimated to not have dental insurance and about 1 in 5 (22%) have a disability.³⁷ Though 2024 survey data show 78% of San Diego County seniors received a dental visit in the past year, utilization data show 28% of those on Medi-Cal received an annual dental visit in 2023.³⁸

Based on 2022 data, 1 in 10 San Diego County seniors are estimated to have lost all their natural teeth, however, the prevalence is estimated to be higher in both rural and urban areas of the region, particularly in areas of Chula Vista, Escondido, El Cajon, Mountain Empire, National City, Oceanside, Ramona, Mid-City and Southeastern San Diego, and South Bay (Fig. 7).³⁹

Fig. 7. All Teeth Lost Among Adults Aged 65+, San Diego



Source: PLACES Interactive Map. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health. <https://arcg.is/1Wfujq3>

³⁶ Huyenh-Cho, T. and Morales, S. (2025). Oral Health for Older Adults in California. Justice in Aging. <https://justiceinaging.org/oral-health-for-older-adults-in-california-advocacy-guide/>

³⁷ UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. AskCHIS 2024 (San Diego). <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/askchis>

³⁸ California Department of Health Care Services, Medi-Cal Dental Services Division. (2025). *Dental Utilization Measures and Sealant Data by County and Age (Calendar Year 2023)* [Dataset]. CalHHS. <https://data.chhs.ca.gov/dataset/test-dhcs-utilization-measures-and-sealant-data-by-county-calendar-year-2013-to-2021>

³⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025). *PLACES: Local Data for Better Health, County Data 2025 release* [Dataset]. 2022 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data. https://data.cdc.gov/500-Cities-Places/PLACES-Local-Data-for-Better-Health-County-Data-20/swc5-untb/about_data.

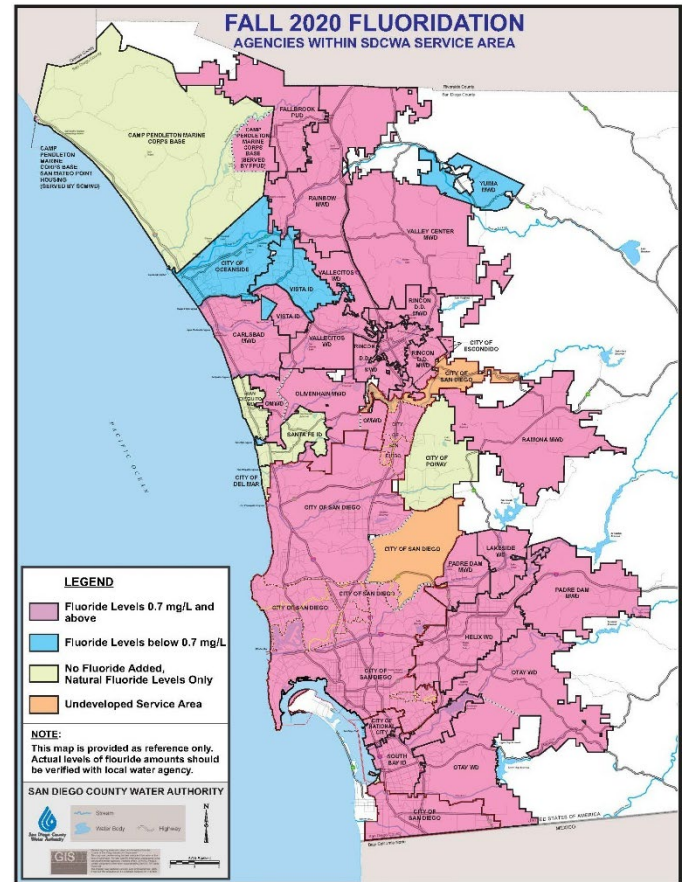
Assets for Community Oral Health

San Diego County has multiple assets across different sectors that support community oral health, including access to fluoridated water, dental services provided outside the dental office in the community, and oral health collaboratives. Appendix A lists additional identified resources, assets, and partners.

Community Water Fluoridation

The U.S. Public Health Service has recommended adding small amounts of fluoride (0.7 mg/L) to public water supplies since the 1960s.⁴⁰ Community water fluoridation helps reduce oral health disparities; in communities where fluoridation has been discontinued, tooth decay has increased. According to California's 2024 Fluoridation Status Report, 24 of 78 public water systems in San Diego County (31%) provided fluoridated water to nearly 2.9 million residents.⁴¹ A 2020 fluoridation map of the region shows areas in Oceanside, Vista, and Pauma Valley had lower than optimum fluoride levels, and areas of Encinitas, Del Mar, Solana Beach, Rancho Santa Fe, and Poway had naturally occurring fluoride levels (Fig. 8).⁴² In January 2025, Olivenhain Municipal Water District motioned to permanently stop fluoridating their water. The motion was modified to stop fluoridating for less than 90 days to address safety concerns staff expressed around handling sodium fluoride.⁴³

Fig. 8. 2020 San Diego County Fluoridation Map



Source: San Diego County Water Authority

Registered Dental Hygienists in Alternative Practice (RDHAPs)

RDHAPs are licensed dental hygienists that provide preventive and therapeutic oral hygiene treatments in settings outside the traditional dental office, such as nursing facilities, patients' residences, and schools. RDHAPs have direct access to vulnerable and underserved populations, such as older adults, people with disabilities, and homebound patients. As of November 2025, 9 RDHAPs were listed on the Medi-Cal Dental website as serving Medi-Cal members in San Diego County.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. (2025). Community Water Fluoridation. <https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/fluoride/community-water-fluoridation>

⁴¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. *Fluoridation Status Report (California, 2024)*. Division of Oral Health: My Water's Fluoride. <http://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/>

⁴² San Diego County Water Authority, personal communication, December 15, 2020.

⁴³ Henry, B. (2026, January 22). North County water board votes to temporarily stop fluoridation. *San Diego Union Tribune*. <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/2026/01/22/north-county-water-board-votes-to-temporarily-stop-fluoridation/>

⁴⁴ California Department of Health Care Services. Registered Dental Hygienists in Alternative Practice (RDHAP). https://dental.dhcs.ca.gov/Members/Medi_Cal_Dental/Find_A_Dentist/RegisteredDentalHygienists. Accessed November 2025.

School-Based and School-Linked Oral Health Programs

Schools present opportunities for improving oral health and expanding access to care through education, screening, referrals, and onsite preventive services. School-based oral health programs address barriers to care for children at high risk for dental decay.⁴⁵ There are 21 reported school-based health and wellness centers in San Diego County: 13 offer dental preventive services, such as screening or fluoride varnish, and 5 offer comprehensive dental care.⁴⁶ The U.S. Community Preventive Services Task Force recommends school-based programs to apply dental sealants.⁴⁷

Collaborative Efforts in San Diego County

Senior Oral Health Partnership

Health Quality Partners of Southern California was awarded a multi-year grant from the Delta Dental Community Care Foundation to enhance oral health care access for seniors in partnership with seven Federally Qualified Health Centers and the County of San Diego.⁴⁸ Asset mapping was done in collaboration with partners to catalog community resources that reach seniors. The [asset map](#) includes partner clinic sites, senior residential communities, senior centers, community centers, libraries, YMCAs, and other organizations providing health or community services.

San Diego County Oral Health Coalition

The coalition is a collaborative effort between the County of San Diego and community partners to improve oral health across the lifespan and achieve oral health equity. The coalition has workgroups focused on improving children's oral health, promoting medical-dental integration through educational opportunities, and creating pathways and resources to support workforce development. Oral health professionals and community organizations interested in collaboration are encouraged to visit the [San Diego County Oral Health Coalition website](#) for information on upcoming meetings, resources, main contacts, and online discussions.

⁴⁵ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2025). Oral Health in Schools. <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/school-health/oral-health-in-schools/?srsltid=AfmBOoqb4KRdrNPzYTWQcccA2phQLquVWSTi3IsKymjLcJ-8l2joxiR>

⁴⁶ California School-Based Health Alliance. List of California School-Based Health & Wellness Centers. <https://www.schoolhealthcenters.org/resource/sbhcs-by-county/>

⁴⁷ Community Preventive Services Task Force. Guide to Community Preventive Services. Dental Caries (Cavities): School-Based Dental Sealant Delivery Programs. <https://www.thecommunityguide.org/findings/dental-caries-cavities-school-based-dental-sealant-delivery-programs.html>

⁴⁸ Health Center Partners of Southern California. <https://hcpsocal.org/san-diego-senior-oral-health-partnership/>

Senior Oral Health Partnership Participating Health Centers

- Community Health Systems, Inc.
- Imperial Beach Community Clinic
- Indian Health Council, Inc.
- Neighborhood Healthcare
- San Ysidro Health
- Father Joe's Villages
- Vista Community Clinic



Gaps and Limitations

This needs assessment is limited to mostly publicly available data sources. Though an online survey of dental providers was conducted in 2024, only 63 responses were received. Due to the small sample size and use of convenience sampling, the results were not representative of the region’s dental provider population. Some results from the 2018 and 2024 dental provider surveys are summarized in Appendix B, and the survey reports are available on the [San Diego County Oral Health Coalition website](#).

Gaps in this needs assessment include data related to dental referrals and care coordination processes and county-level oral health data for Native American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations, people experiencing homelessness, veterans, refugees, and undocumented residents.

Conclusion

The needs identified by the compiled San Diego County oral health data are summarized below.



These needs highlight the importance of partnerships with dental providers, healthcare organizations, schools, professional networks, and community-based organizations to collectively impact and improve access to the oral healthcare system in San Diego County. This information will be used to develop a community oral health improvement plan using a collective impact approach, keeping in mind the feasibility and sustainability of oral health efforts in the current political and funding landscape.

Appendix A: Additional Identified Assets, Resources, and Partners

The following are non-exhaustive lists of identified resources, assets, and partners supporting community oral health in San Diego County. These lists build off the results of the [2019 Inventory of Assets Report](#).

Finding and accessing dental services

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Population focus</i>
211 San Diego	General
Anderson Center for Oral Health, Rady Children’s Health	Children with special healthcare needs
Cura Smiles	People without healthcare access
Federally Qualified Health Centers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Health Systems, Inc. • DAP Health • Family Health Centers of San Diego • Father Joe’s Villages* • Imperial Beach Community Clinic • Indian Health Council, Inc.† • La Maestra • Neighborhood Healthcare • Opsam Health • San Diego Community Health Center • San Diego Family Care • San Ysidro Health <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Special Needs Adult Dental Clinic‡ ○ Gary and Mary West Senior Dental Center# • Southern Indian Health Council • Sycuan Health Center • Truecare • Vista Community Clinic 	Medically underserved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *People experiencing homelessness †Tribal and reservation populations ‡People with physical and mental disabilities #Seniors
Dental Lifeline Network	Individuals with no other means to afford or receive dental care who are over age 65, permanently disabled, or need medically necessary dental care
First 5 San Diego Oral Health Initiative	Children ages 0-5
John Geis, DDS Dental Clinic	Veterans
Project Allsmiles Inc.	Seniors, individuals with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness, children in underserved communities

Finding and accessing dental services (continued)

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Population focus</i>
San Diego Mesa College Health & Wellness Community Clinic	Low income
San Diego Regional Center	Individuals with developmental disabilities
Smile, California Find A Dentist	Medi-Cal members
St. Leo Urgent Care Dental Clinic	Individuals needing emergency dental services
UC San Diego Pre-Dental Society Student-Run Free Dental Clinics	Individuals who are low income, uninsured, and/or homeless needing emergency dental services

For Health Professionals

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Description</i>
Bright Futures	Initiative led by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) that provides guidance for preventive care screenings and health supervision visits
California Dental Association Resource Library	Multiple resources for dentists around dental benefit plans, employment practices, practice management, regulatory compliance, and patient care
Journal of the American Dental Association	Official journal of the American Dental Association (ADA)
Medi-Cal Dental Care Coordination Referral	For health providers, schools, and community organizations to request dental care coordination for Medi-Cal members
Medi-Cal Dental Case Management Program	For medical providers, dental providers, case workers, or healthcare professionals to request case management services for Medi-Cal members with significant medical, physical, and/or behavioral diagnosis
Medi-Cal Dental Provider Bulletin	Monthly online publication of Medi-Cal Dental news and information for Medi-Cal Dental Fee-For-Service providers
San Diego County Dental Foundation	Charitable organization that raises funds, grants scholarships, deploys volunteer dental providers, and operates the John Geiss, DDS Dental Clinic
San Diego County Dental Society	The largest professional dental organization serving San Diego and Imperial counties and has a Dental Assistant Academy of Learning program
Spear Education	Provides Continuing Education and practice support

For Patient Education

<i>Resource</i>	<i>Description</i>
healthychildren.org	AAP website for parents
American Dental Association Patient Education Materials	Offers patient education materials on nutrition, hypertension, oral health for children ages 0-6, fluoride, and more
Smile, California Promotional Materials	Oral health education and benefits information for Medi-Cal members in multiple formats
What To Do For Healthy Teeth	Health Literacy Academy book for personal oral health care and children's oral health care

Organizations and programs partnering with the County of San Diego Local Oral Health Program to enhance or integrate services with oral health

<i>Category</i>	<i>Partner</i>
Child Development Centers/ Early Head Starts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children from the Rainbow • Episcopal Community Services • La Casita Daycare Center
County of San Diego	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black Infant Health Program • California Home Visiting Program • Community Health Workers • Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program • Health Care Program for Children in Foster Care • Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health Program • Public Health Home Visiting Nurses
Family Support Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scripps Health Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program
Home Visiting Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Kids Academy Head Start • First 5 First Steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Home Start, Inc. ○ Palomar Health ○ SAY San Diego ○ South Bay Community Services • Easter Seals
School Districts/Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bonsall School District • Barona Charter School • DaVinci Charter School • Fallbrook Union Elementary • Integrity Charter School • Julian Elementary School • Julian Middle School • KIPP Adelante Charter School

School Districts/Schools
(continued)

- La Mesa Spring Valley School District
- Lakeside Union Elementary
- Monarch School
- San Diego County Office of Education
- San Diego Unified School District
- South Bay Unified School District
- Vista Unified School District

Appendix B: Updates from the 2019 Needs Assessment

The table below provides updates for some of the data included in the 2019 Available Local Oral Health Data Summary Report, available on the [San Diego County Oral Health Coalition website](#).

Measure	2019 Report		2025 Update	
	Data	Source	Data	Source
Ratio of Dentists to Population	83 per 100,000 (n.d.)	DataUSA (retrieved 2018)	101 per 100,000 population in 2022 (88 per 100,000 population in 2018)	County Health Rankings 2025 Annual Data Release
Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)	19 Total: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 Federally Qualified Health Centers 5 Native American/Tribal Facility Population 2 Low Income Population 	Health Resources and Services Administration Data Warehouse (retrieved 2019)	27 Total Dental HPSAs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11 Federally Qualified Health Centers 8 Indian Health Service, Tribal Health, and Urban Indian Health Organizations 3 Low Income Population 3 Medicaid Eligible Population 2 Correctional Facilities 	Health Resources and Services Administration Data Warehouse (retrieved 2025)
Has Dental Insurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Among adults with health insurance: 71% Among adults without health insurance: 21% Among children with health insurance: 96% 	2017 California Health Interview Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Among adults with health insurance: 80% Among adults without health insurance: 31% Among children with health insurance: 95% 	2024 California Health Interview Survey
Visited dentist in the past year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children: 88% Adults: 74% 	2014 California Health Interview Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children: 86% Adults: 76% 	2024 California Health Interview Survey
Children 0-5 who have never visited a dentist	31%	First 5 2018 Annual Report (cited 2016 California Health Interview Survey)	23%	2023-2024 California Health Interview Survey

Measure	2019 Report		2025 Update	
	Data	Source	Data	Data
Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA) Outcomes	Caries Experience: 27% Visible/Untreated Tooth Decay: 21% Need Urgent Dental Care: 4%	2017-2018 KOHA data, County of San Diego	Caries Experience: 29% Visible/Untreated Tooth Decay: 23% Need Urgent Dental Care: 3%	2024-2025 KOHA data, County of San Diego
Medi-Cal Dental Utilization	Annual Dental Visit in 2018 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults 65-74: 25% Adults 75+: 22% Dental Treatment in 2018 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults 65-74: 16% Adults 75+: 15% 	2018 Medi-Cal Dental Utilization data, California Department of Health Care Services	Annual Dental Visit in 2023 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults 65-74: 30% Adults 75+: 26% Dental Treatment in 2023 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults 65-74: 22% Adults 75+: 20% 	2023 Medi-Cal Dental Utilization data, California Department of Health Care Services

The table below compares findings from the 2018 Dental Provider Survey and the 2024 Dental Provider Survey. Results from the 2018 Dental Provider Survey are included in the 2019 Local Oral Health Community Engagement Assessment Report. Both the 2019 report and 2024 Dental Provider Survey Results are available on the [San Diego County Oral Health Coalition website](#).

	2018 Dental Provider Survey	2024 Dental Provider Survey
Total respondents	74*	63*
Sees children for the first time by age 1	22/66 (37%)	32/58 (55%)
Regularly screens patients for oral cancer	59/62 (80%)	52/60 (87%)
Refers tobacco users to cessation services	17/59 (29%)	15/60 (25%); 34/60 (57%) provide tobacco cessation counseling
Agrees most patients know how to find an oral health provider	73%†	32/55 (60%)
Agrees most patients adequately utilize oral health services	60%†	23/56 (41%)
Agrees most pregnant patients adequately utilize oral health services	55%†	21/55 (38%)
Agrees most patients bring children to the dentist by age 1 or first tooth eruption	20%†	21/56 (40%)
Agrees most patients understand the importance of preventive oral health services	59%†	24/56 (43%)

* Limitations include low response and convenience sampling. Results were not representative of oral health professionals in San Diego County.

† Numerators and denominators not included in 2019 report.