

**NEW HAMPSHIRE SENIOR CENTER DENTAL SURVEY
RESULTS
August 2010**

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Division of Public Health Services
Chronic Disease Prevention and Screening Section
Oral Health Program**

November 2010

INTRODUCTION

In May 2000 *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General* identified significant disparities in the oral health status of older Americans and the resulting consequences to their health. A growing body of evidence recognizes bacterial inflammation as the primary mechanism that links poor oral health to heart disease, stroke, and diabetes, diseases that have a significant impact, especially on older people.¹ Geriatric oral health care is an area often overlooked in the education and training of health professionals, who may not understand the link between oral health in the elderly and their quality of life.

Limited data are available about the oral health status of older Americans. The New Hampshire Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) provides the only data on the oral health status of New Hampshire adults. According to national BRFSS data, overall use of dental services decreases with advancing age. Nationwide, fewer than 50% of people surveyed who were 65 years or older had visited a dentist once in the preceding 12 months.² This supports common beliefs that a vulnerable population of seniors is going without oral health care. 2006 BRFSS data in New Hampshire showed that 18.6% of New Hampshire residents 65 years old or older were edentulous (without teeth).³

SURVEY PURPOSE

This survey was commissioned by the New Hampshire Oral Health Program (OHP) to add to the body of knowledge about oral health among New Hampshire seniors. The purpose of the survey was to collect information about oral health status, access, and attitudes from a small population of New Hampshire seniors in selected senior centers and congregate meal sites. Survey results will be used to guide program planning to address identified needs.

The report begins with a summary of the survey methodology and limitations. It then summarizes demographic characteristics of survey respondents. Then the report presents survey responses related to three areas asked about in the survey: oral health status, access to dental services and barriers faced, and attitudes about oral health and dental care.

¹ Oral and whole body health. *Sci Am*.2006.

² Surveillance for Use of Preventive Health Services by Older Adults, 1995-1997. CDC website MMWR surveillance Summaries Dec 17, 1999/48(SS08); 51-88.

³ *Oral Health in New Hampshire, Data Brief*, January 2008.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

The survey was developed and conducted by the Evaluation Consultant in partnership with the OHP. A copy of the survey instrument is provided in Appendix A. The survey was anonymous and questions were based on several existing surveys and developed by the Evaluation Consultant in cooperation with OHP. Several external experts also reviewed the survey and their suggestions were incorporated. A draft survey was shared with seniors at one of the senior centers prior to administration to determine appropriateness of the questions. Feedback was obtained verbally and incorporated into the final version.

The survey was administered in six senior centers in New Hampshire on a rolling basis from March 2010 through May 2010. Three centers were located in rural areas of the State and three were located in more urban areas. For purposes of this survey, seniors were defined as individuals 65 years or older. The centers were chosen to represent geographic diversity; willingness of sites to participate was also a criterion. After full administration of the survey at the first site, several minor modifications were made to the survey, changes that do not affect interpretation of results across sites.

The survey was administered in hard copy. A modification to the survey administration was made from the original project proposal. The original proposal outlined a survey process in which senior center directors would distribute and collect the surveys over a two week period. However, in order to maximize senior participation, an oral health educational presentation and distribution and collection of the surveys all occurred on the same day. As a result, OHP staff administered the survey at each center. OHP staff worked with management of the senior centers to identify the most appropriate time for survey administration with a focus on maximizing the number of seniors who would be present to complete the survey. Plans for each visit included ensuring that seniors would have time to complete the survey as well as listen to a short presentation by OHP on senior oral health after survey administration was over. As a result, the survey was typically administered during a congregate meal time and scheduled for the most popular monthly luncheon offering.

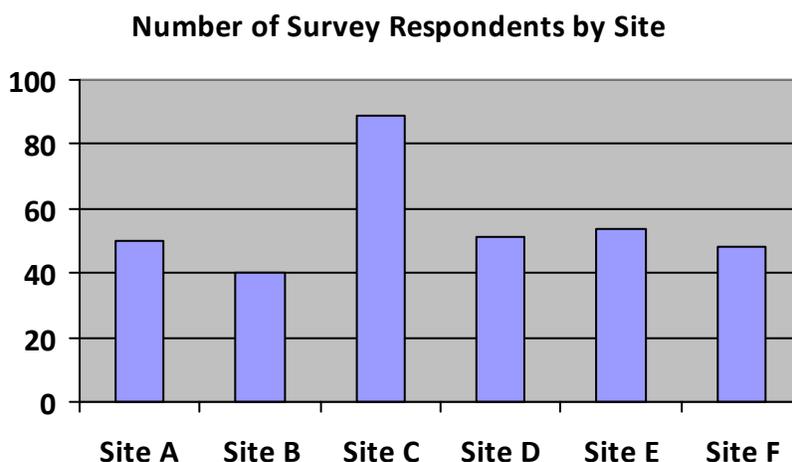
Seniors were asked if they wished to complete the survey. Seniors were given the opportunity to opt out of the survey and most did not. In return for completing their surveys, seniors were provided with a “goody” bag of oral health supplies. The number of surveys collected exceeded expectations. In total, 330 surveys were completed, far higher than the 200 anticipated. In addition, the proposal had originally called for survey administration in five senior centers. An additional center was added to serve as a beta test site.

The data summarized in this report reflect survey results obtained from self-selecting seniors in deliberately chosen senior centers. As such, three limitations to the analysis need to be noted:

- Results are limited to the senior survey respondents. Because neither the senior centers nor the seniors themselves were randomly selected for the survey, results cannot be generalized across all senior centers or all seniors who attend senior centers in New Hampshire.
- It is important to recognize that these survey results represent one segment of New Hampshire’s senior population. Other segments are those who are home bound, those in assisted living arrangements, and those who are in long-term care (i.e., nursing homes). Compared with these other groups, those attending senior centers are likely to be more mobile and healthier than the other groups in general.⁴ Therefore, any conclusions drawn must be limited to this subgroup of seniors.
- The data collected in the survey are self-reported by the respondents and are therefore potentially subject to recall and bias issues.
- Results are presented in aggregate for all respondents. There were no statistically significant differences found across gender or age. Small respondent numbers precluded analysis by site.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Three hundred and thirty (330) seniors completed the survey across the six sites. The following chart identifies the number of respondents by each site. However, not all survey respondents completed all questions. Therefore, the number of survey responses will vary by question. The total number of respondents for each question is noted as “N=” throughout the report.

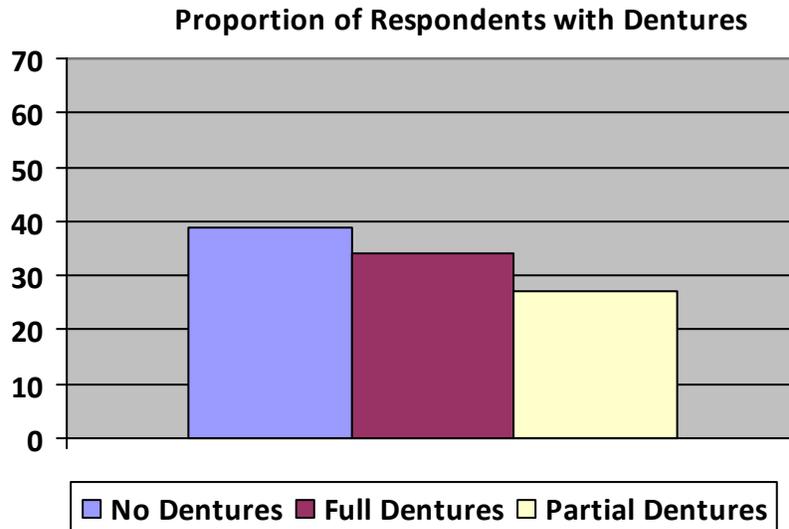


71% of survey respondents were female and 29% were male (N=299). 98% of respondents reported that their race was “white.” Seven individuals reported another race. Thirty-four (34) individuals did not identify their race. 43% of respondents reported that their age was between 71 and 80 years, 31% reported that their age was over 80, and 26% reported their age as under 70 (N=277).

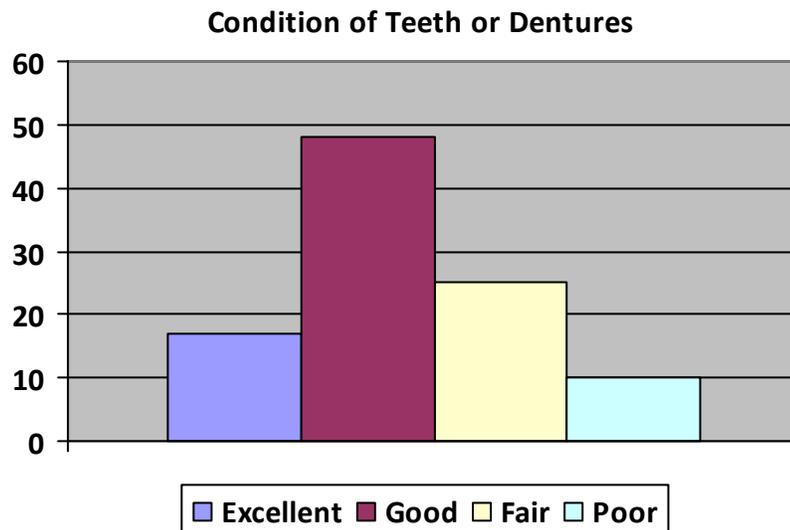
⁴ Although it is important to note that home bound seniors may be home bound due to lack of transportation rather than health concerns.

RESPONDENT ORAL HEALTH CHARACTERISTICS

39% of respondents reported that they did not have dentures. 34% reported that they had full dentures, and 27% reported that they had partial dentures (N=317).

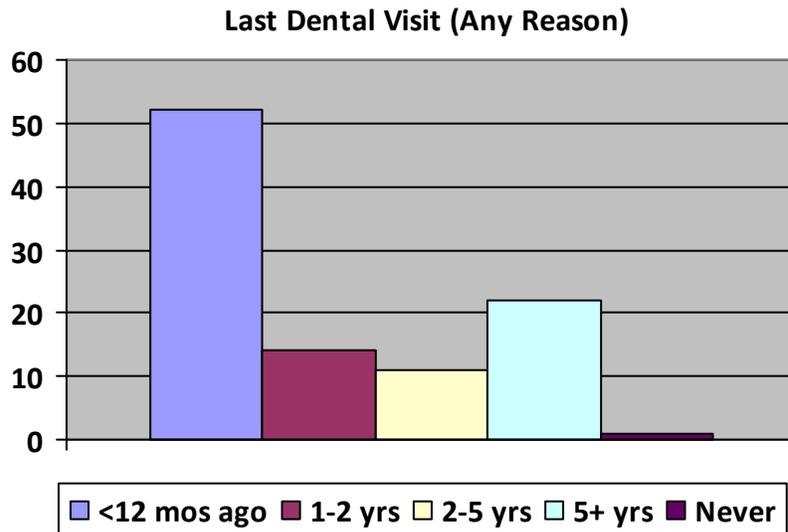


48% of survey respondents reported that their teeth or dentures were in “good” condition, 25% reported “fair” condition, 17% reported “excellent condition,” and 10% reported “poor” condition (N=310).



USE OF ORAL HEALTH SERVICES

52% of respondents reported that they had visited the dentist or a dental clinic less than 12 months ago. 14% reported that they visited in the past 1-2 years, 11% in the past 2-5 years, 22% more than 5 years ago, and 1% reported that they had never visited a dentist or dental clinic (N=292).

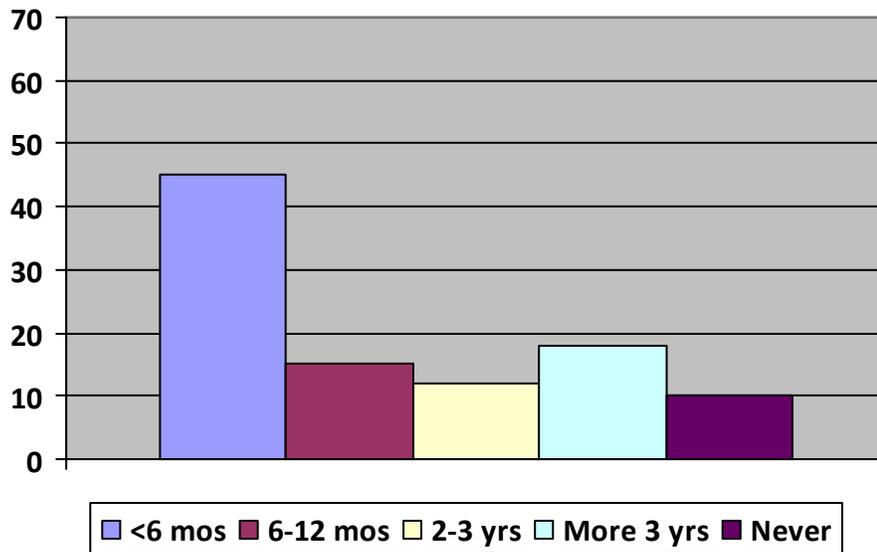


Of respondents who provided a reason for their dental visit, 54% reported that they visited for a cleaning and check-up (routine visit), 27% reported that they visited for denture adjustment, denture repair or to obtain dentures, 6% reported that they had a tooth or teeth removed, 6% reported that they had a filling, 2% reported a broken tooth, and 5% gave another reason for the visit (N=229).

Of those who reported their satisfaction with their last dental visit, 70% reported that they were "very satisfied," 15% reported that they were "somewhat satisfied," 4% reported being "somewhat dissatisfied," 5% reported being "very dissatisfied," and 6% reported "no opinion" (N=311).

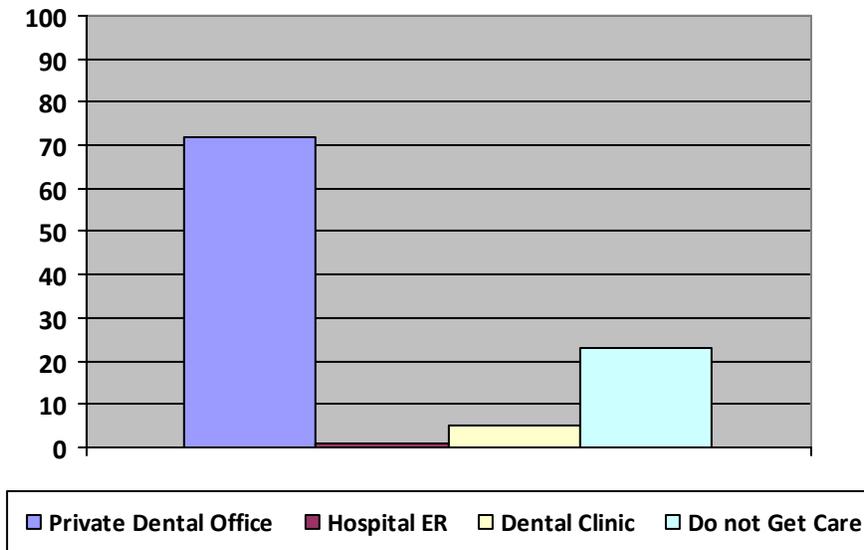
45% of respondents reported that they had their teeth cleaned less than 6 months ago, 15% between 6 and 12 months, 12% between 2-3 years, 18% more than 3 years ago, and 10% reported never having had their teeth cleaned (N=262).

Last Cleaning

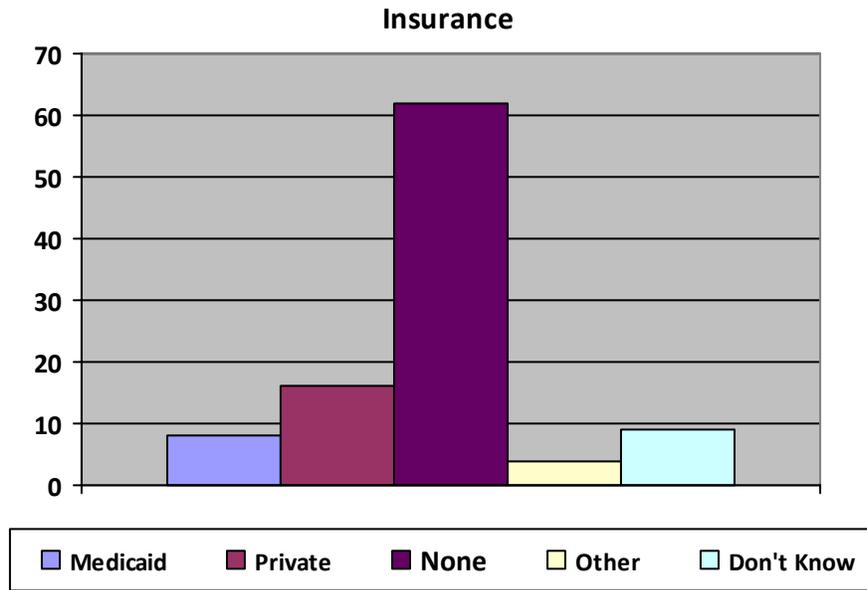


72% of respondents reported that they get their dental care at a private dentist’s office, 5% report getting it at a dental clinic, and 1% report getting it at the hospital emergency room; 23% report that they do not get dental care (N=311).

Source of Dental Care

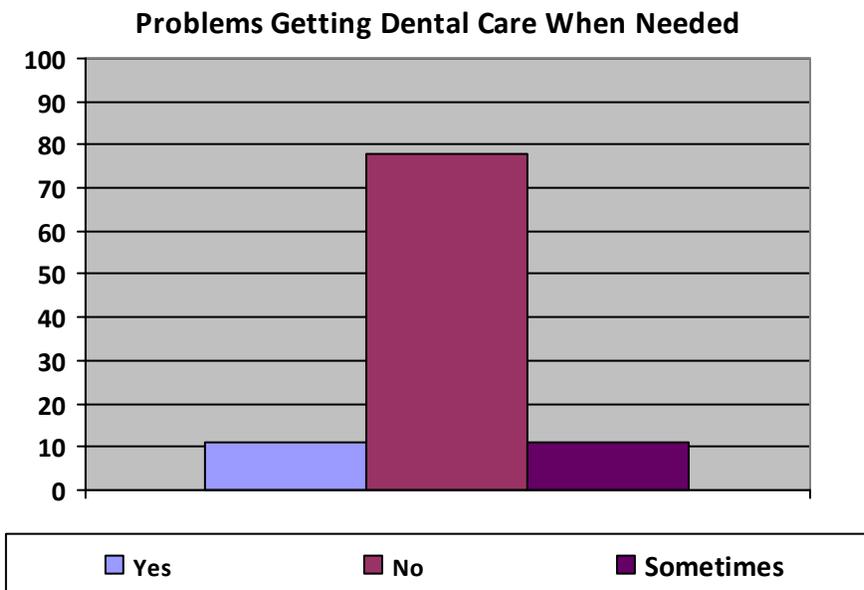


62% of respondents reported that they do not have dental insurance, 16% reported that they have private dental insurance, 8% report that they have Medicaid, 4% reported that they have another kind of insurance, and 9% reported that they don’t know whether they have dental insurance (N=298).



ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE

Respondents were asked if they have problems getting dental care when they need it. 11% reported that they have problems, 78% reported that they did not have problems, and 11% reported that they sometimes have problems getting dental care when they need it (N=295).

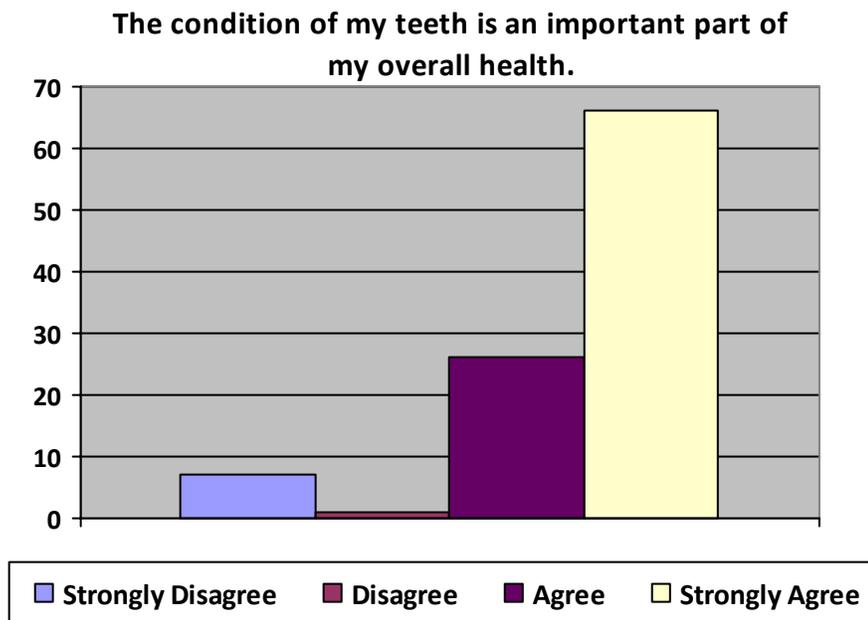


Respondents who indicated that they had problems accessing care were asked to identify what barriers they faced. The following data presents these responses (N=113).⁵

- 75% Can't afford dental care
- 18% Fearfulness of dental visit
- 17% Can't get a dental appointment when needed
- 12% Don't have transportation to dental appointments
- 2% Dental provider is not handicapped accessible

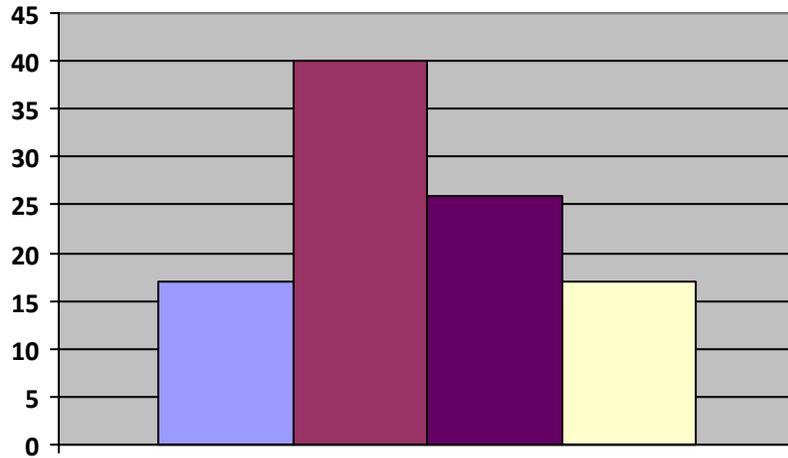
ATTITUDES ABOUT ORAL HEALTH CARE AND DENTAL SERVICES

Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement relative to questions about overall oral health as well as about dental visits. The following summarizes these results overall and by gender and age groups (note scale variations from question to question).

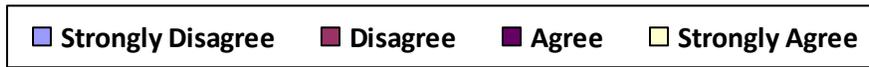
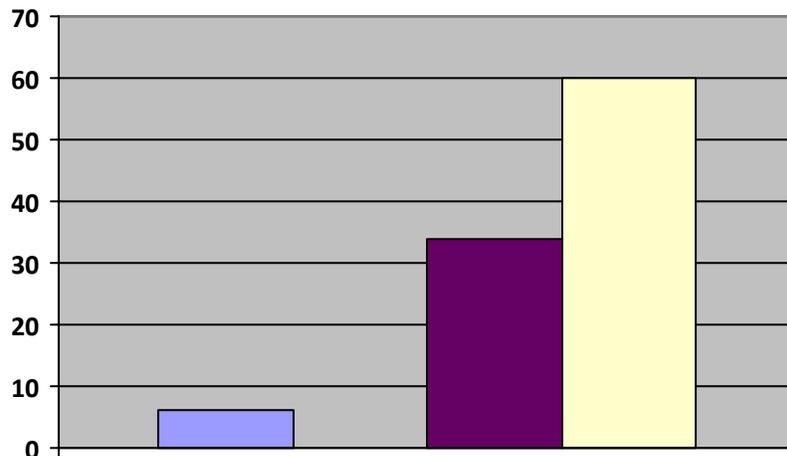


⁵ Because respondents could choose more than one barrier, the total is greater than 100%.

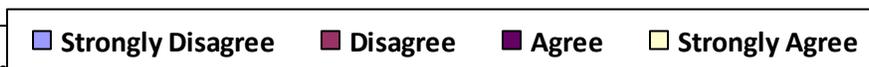
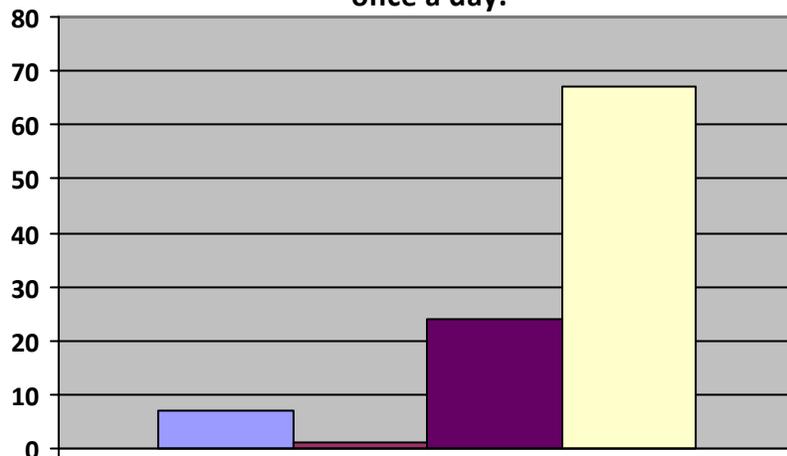
Tooth loss is part of getting older.



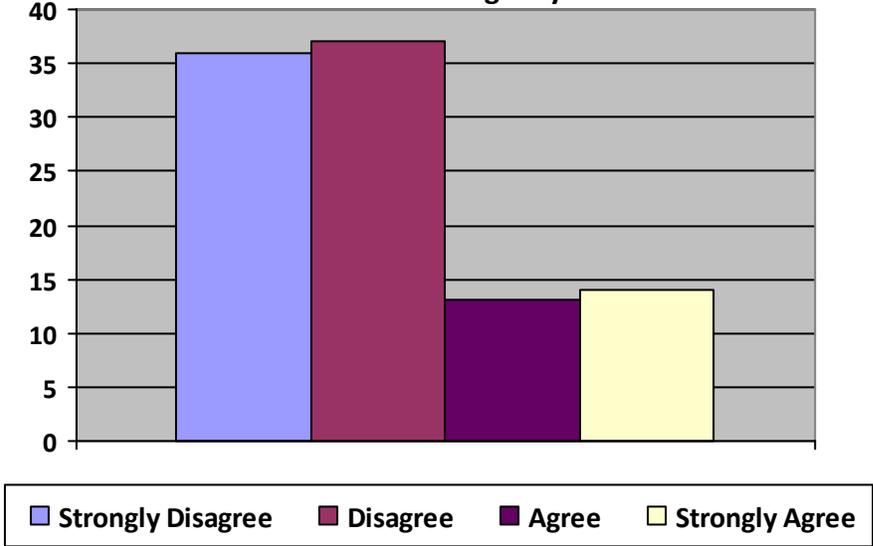
It is important to keep your natural teeth.



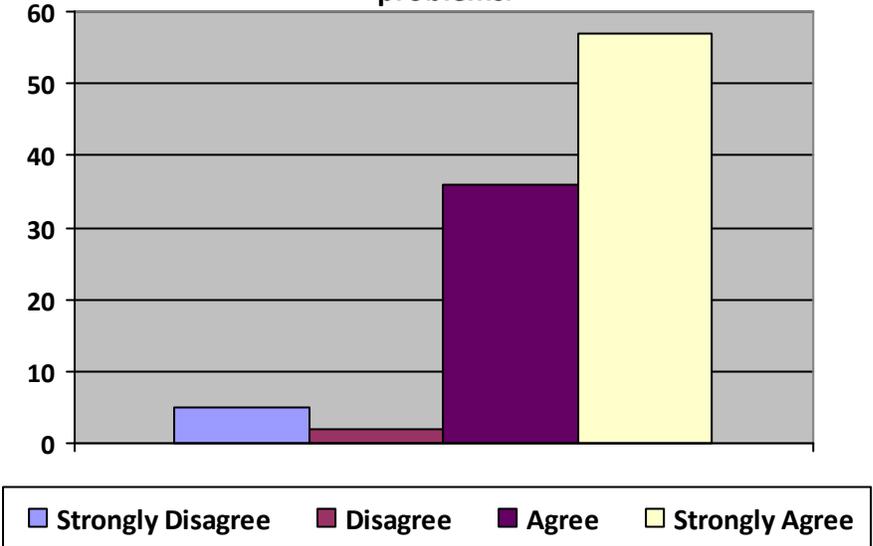
It is important to brush your teeth at least once a day.



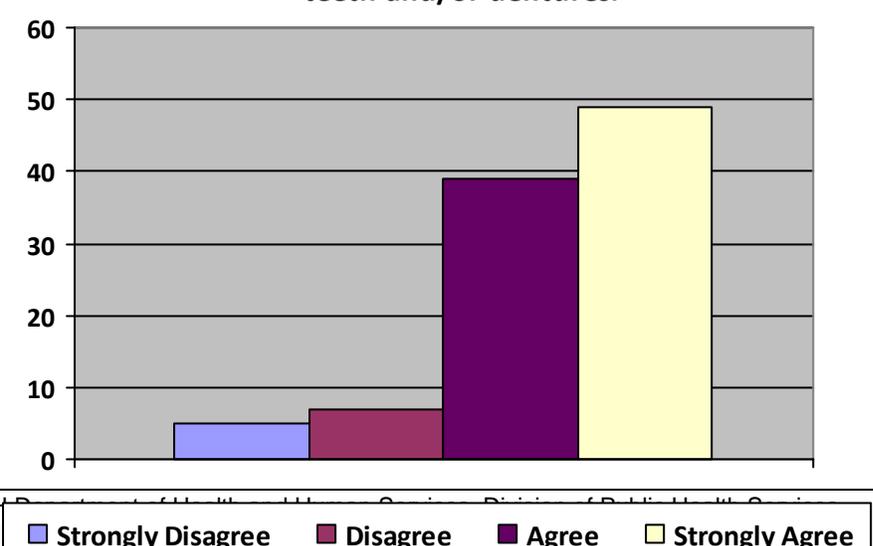
Dental visits are only important if you have a dental emergency.



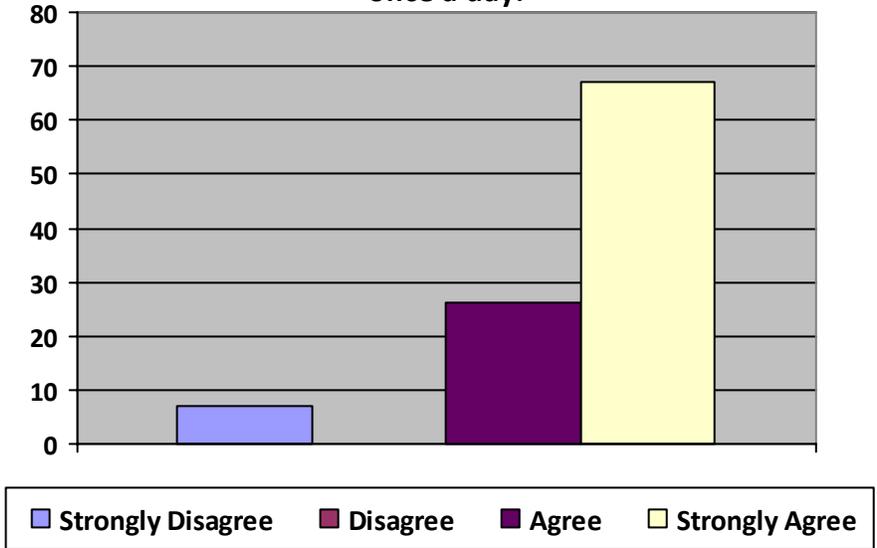
Regular checkups will help prevent dental problems.



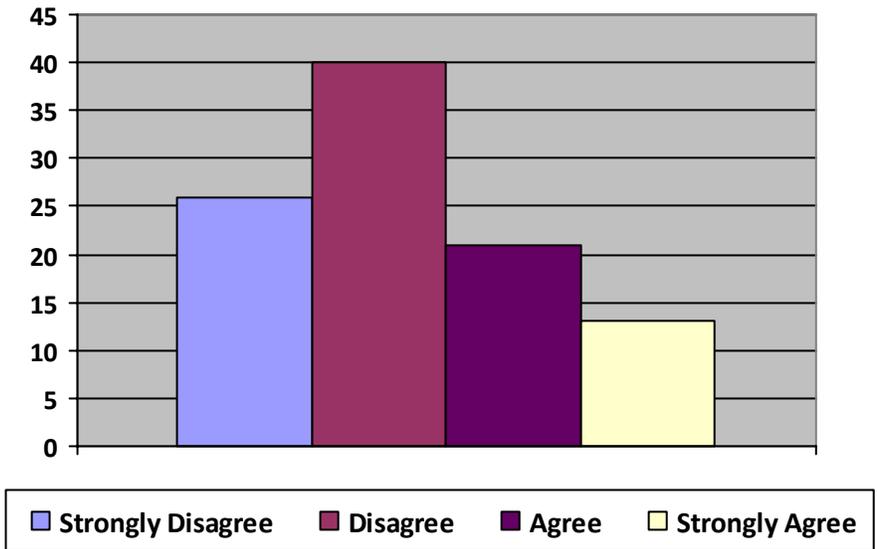
Dental visits are important even for those without teeth and/or dentures.



It is important to clean your dentures at least once a day.



Dental visits cause pain.



The final question of the survey asked respondents to share anything about their dental care or dental experiences that they thought were relevant. Very few respondents answered this question. All responses to this question are included below.

- I need a new partial and can't afford it
- I use little brush picks that get between each tooth. Dental paste once
- Dental cost would be real nice.
- Don't hurt
- Can't afford dentures
- Brush well every day
- I've been very lucky to find painless dentists
- Lack of funds and poor dental care when young has caused great losses in teeth and gums, family ancestrals can cause great fear of pain, etc. Most everyone in the family

(except for myself and siblings) has lost all of their teeth and don't go to dentist. Many have had dentures; some as early as 15 years old.

- Very satisfied with all services and I get a 10% senior discount
- Make sure you have the best dentists in the area. Some would rather take out a tooth than do a repair.
- Dental care is very expensive without insurance.
- I have XXX which hurts my jaws and ears. Doctor told to me to call social services as my wife is paying hers. He thought someone would help me to find a solution to this dilemma.
- Hospital helped me to get help. I get help for medical problems because we need it bad, medicine is very expensive.
- I want to keep my teeth as long as possible
- whatever material used I have a bad reaction
- too expensive
- Have had my dentures since April 1953
- Sooner or later I will lose all my teeth because I cannot afford dental care
- How come they cannot whiten dentures?
- Dentist won't clean teeth without x-ray
- Go every six months
- Not very satisfied with provider presently although I do get in fairly soon when needed but care, to me, seems below standard that should be given.
- very good
- I am fortunate to have my own teeth at 82 years of age.
- Visits to the dentist cost too much
- Had bad experience with dentist I have had for years
- Not satisfied
- too expensive
- take care of your own teeth
- excellent dentist, great staff, no turn over
- brush your teeth regular and then you won't have false teeth
- When I was working I had dental insurance. Now I don't and dental care is very expensive
- take care--natural teeth better than dentures
- My first set of dentures lasted me 22 years
- Partials hurt
- My insurance only covers a little bit of the cost

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Results of this survey indicate that:

- Senior respondents to this survey in general, have good oral health and access to health care. 17% of respondents reported that their teeth or dentures were in "excellent" condition and 48% reported that they were in "good" condition. 52% reported that they had visited the dentists or a dental clinic for any reason within the past 12 months. 1% reported that they had never visited a dentist or dental clinic. 60% reported

that they had their teeth cleaned in the past year. 10% reported that they never had their teeth cleaned.

- 78% of respondents reported that they did not have problems getting dental care when they needed it. 11% reported that they have problems and another 11% reported that they sometimes have problems getting dental care when they need it. When asked about barriers respondents faced when accessing dental care, the largest proportion of respondents (75%) reported that they cannot afford dental care. Additional barriers cited were fearfulness of the dental visit (18%), inability to get a dental appointment when needed (17%), and lack of transportation (12%).⁶
- Private dentist's offices was the most frequently cited source of dental care (72%). 5% of respondents reported getting dental care at a clinic and 1% from a hospital emergency room. 23% reported that they do not get dental care. 62% reported that they do not have dental insurance.
- Responses to questions related to attitudes and understanding about oral health and oral hygiene indicate that overall, respondents understand that the condition of their teeth is a part of their overall health and that it is important to keep one's natural teeth. Perspectives were more split on the question of whether tooth loss is part of getting older: 42% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement while 58% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.
- Senior respondents overall also indicated understanding of the importance of preventive oral care. Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to brush your teeth or dentures at least once a day, that regular checkups will prevent dental problems, and that dental visits are important even for those without teeth and/or dentures. Although in response to an earlier question, fear of the dental visit was not identified as a barrier to care by many respondents, about 30% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that dental visits cause pain.

FUTURE PROGRAM PLANNING

The majority of seniors surveyed for this project indicated that they understand the importance of oral health to their total health and the value of regular dental check ups and preventive care. Survey results also indicate that the majority of seniors surveyed have no dental insurance and find the cost of dental care unaffordable. A significant number stated that they have trouble finding dental care when needed. These results provide the basis for implementation of a pilot project that will bring preventive dental care to the six participating senior centers to screen interested older adults, provide them with on-site preventive care, and link those needing additional dental treatment to dental services delivered in local dental offices. New Hampshire's Oral Health Program plans to apply to the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors (NACDD) for the next round of Opportunity Grants for Healthy Aging to implement the oral health pilot project.

⁶ Because respondents were able to choose more than one response, the total is greater than 100%.

APPENDIX A: DENTAL HEALTH SURVEY

Thank you for completing this survey. Your answers will help us better understand the dental health needs in this community. Your answers are anonymous so please be as honest and complete as you can. Do not put your name on this survey and please complete it only once.

1. How would you describe the condition of your **TEETH** or **DENTURES**?
 Excellent Good Fair Poor
2. Do you have dentures? Yes full Yes partial No
3. How long has it been since you last visited a dentist or a dental clinic for any reason?
 Less than 12 months ago More than 5 years ago
 Between 1-2 years ago Never
 Between 2-5 years ago Do Not Remember
4. What was the main reason for your last dental visit? (please print)

5. How satisfied were you with your last visit?
 Very Satisfied Somewhat satisfied
 Somewhat Dissatisfied Very Dissatisfied No opinion

Please explain: (please print) _____
6. How long has it been since you had your teeth cleaned by a dentist or dental hygienist?
 In the past 6 months More than 3 years ago
 Between 6-12 months ago Don't remember
 Between 2-3 years ago Never
7. Where do you currently get your dental care?
 Private dental office Public dental clinic
 Hospital emergency room I do not get dental care
8. Do you have problems getting dental care when you need it? Yes No Sometimes
9. Do you have any kind of insurance that pays for some or all of your dental care? (please check all that apply)
 Medicaid Other
 Private insurance Don't Know
 None

PLEASE TURN OVER

10. Have you ever experienced the following barriers getting dental care? (please check all that apply)

- Can't get a dental appointment when you need it
- Can't afford dental care
- Don't have transportation to dental appointments
- Dental provider is not handicapped accessible
- Fearfulness of dental visit
- Other (please explain): _____

11. Please tell us what you think about the statements below by checking the appropriate box:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
a. Dental visits are only important if you have a dental emergency.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. It is important to keep your natural teeth.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. It is important to brush your teeth at least once a day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. It is important to clean your dentures at least once a day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. The condition of my teeth is an important part of my overall health.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. Dental visits are important even for those without teeth and/or dentures.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. Tooth loss is part of getting older.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. Dental visits cause pain.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i. Regular checkups will help prevent dental problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. What is your gender? Male Female

13. What year were you born? _____

14. What is your race?

- Prefer not to answer
- White
- Black or African American
- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Other

15. If you have anything to share about your dental care or dental experiences, please share them here: (please print)

Thank you very much for completing this survey. Please return the survey to the front desk and pick up your thank you gift.