

# Policy Perspectives The Pediatric Dentist Workforce

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# The Overall Supply of Pediatric Dentists Has Increased

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- Important policy implications for pediatric dentists specifically and for the oral health delivery system generally
- Past concerns about an inadequate supply of dentists specifically trained to work with children, especially those with special health care needs
- Federal support for residency training of pediatric dentists has consequently improved supply
- This study approximated a sufficient supply of pediatric dentists to meet current overall demand for services
- As a result, the oral health delivery system is better positioned to provide dental homes for children beginning at age 1
- Current supply suggests capacity to also provide improved access for special needs populations

# But There Is Nuance in the Numbers

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- Study findings also point to areas of continuing concern warranting supportive policy initiatives
  - While current national supply appears adequate (relative to current demand), there is still a shortfall of pediatric dentists in certain geographic areas and underserved communities
  - Uneven distribution relative to population of children
  - Need to develop policies and programs to encourage pediatric dentists to locate practices in underserved communities
    - Dental loan repayment incentives at the state and national level
    - Funding to support residency programs in community/public health settings where high needs patients often receive services
    - Encourage alternative modes of service delivery

# Findings Also Support the Importance of Improving Demand for Pediatric Oral Health Services

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## Oral Health Literacy

- While we have improved access to oral health care, many children still do not receive any care in a year or do not receive services at the standard of care.
- Efforts to improve health and oral health literacy among parents and children are important
- Efforts to educate and encourage parents to bring children at age 1 to the dentist should continue
  - 75% of parents either do not know about this recommendation or are failing to engage
- While growth in the population of children in the US is slowing, growth is anticipated to occur in populations that are traditionally underserved including minority and low-income populations

# The Findings Have Implications for the Delivery System

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- Supply of general dentists is growing more slowly
  - may lead to increasing reliance on pediatric dental specialists to meet the needs of children
- Debt burden on general dentists is significant and may further discourage robust participation with public benefit programs
- Pediatric dentists serve, on average, more Medicaid eligible children than general dentists
  - Support continuation of Medicaid and CHIP EPSDT benefits as a minimum standard of care
- Growing emphasis on prevention and value based care in both medicine and dentistry will encourage early and ongoing preventative care
- Aging of the population may increase demands on general dentists from the older adult population

# Questions?

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