

# BEYOND BRUSHING

## THE IMPACT OF RACISM ON ORAL HEALTH IN COLORADO

US institutions have a long history of segregating communities of color, concentrating resources in white communities, and designing systems that benefit white people. This leads to preventable differences in the health of our mouths, teeth, and gums, which are closely connected to our overall health.



### WHAT IMPACTS ORAL HEALTH?

Genetics and behaviors have less of an impact on health than social determinants, which are largely out of our control.

**Social Determinants of Access to Care**, such as dental insurance or transportation to a clinic, impact our ability to get dental care

**Social Determinants of Health**, such as proximity to grocery stores, impact our ability to make healthy life choices

**Social Determinants of Equity** are underlying social, political, and economic forces, such as racism, that shape our world



#### Examples of SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF ACCESS TO CARE

**Coloradans with dental insurance and local dental care have better oral health.** However, communities of color have less access to both, due to the unjust distribution of health care resources.

##### INSURANCE

Have dental insurance:

 **71%** of whites  
**67%** of Hispanic

Had a dental visit last year:

 **76%** of insured  
**45%** of uninsured

##### ACCESS TO CARE

Nearly all communities that are more than **40% people of color** also have **too few dentists for the population**



 40%+ People of Color  
 Dentist Shortage  
 40%+ People of Color AND Dentist Shortage

#### Examples of SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

**Coloradans with access to healthy food and water have better oral health.** However, communities of color have less access to both, due to centuries of discriminatory policies that disadvantage people of color.

##### FOOD SECURITY & ACCESS

 **17%** of white children in Colorado don't have enough food

 **37%** of children of color in Colorado don't have enough food



**has the largest concentration in Colorado of both:**

- ▶ People of color (72%) **AND**
- ▶ People with low incomes who do not live close to a grocery store (49%)

##### WATER FLUORIDATION



Fluoridated water **prevents 25% of cavities** and Colorado communities that have it **save \$149 million each year** in health care costs...

**...but only 75% of Coloradans have fluoridated water**

#### Examples of SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF EQUITY

**Both the subtle and explicit ways racism shows up in our systems and institutions have negative impacts on oral health.** Communities of color experience the repercussions in their health care and daily lives.

##### DIVERSITY

**30%** of Coloradans are people of color



**2%** of Colorado dentists and dental hygienists are people of color

##### CARE BIAS

Studies show that most health care providers, including dentists, **have implicit bias against people of color.** Implicit bias affects patient-provider interaction, treatment decisions, and health outcomes.

##### TOXIC STRESS

Toxic stressors, such as racism and violence, seriously impact health, including oral health.

**22% of blacks**  
**3% of whites**

have avoided medical care in the US out of concerns about racial discrimination

*The opportunity to live a healthy life should be a matter of fact, not a matter of privilege. Because when our neighbors are healthy, our communities prosper, and Colorado is stronger.*



# SOLUTIONS & SOURCES

All data are Colorado-specific unless otherwise noted. For more comprehensive citations, contact [weare@centerforhealthprogress.org](mailto:weare@centerforhealthprogress.org).



## ACCESS TO CARE

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Increase enrollment in dental insurance.** Fund outreach for public and private dental plans.
- Recruit dental providers and add services to areas that need them.** Increase incentives and train local community members.
- Integrate oral and medical health care.** Train primary care providers on basic oral health care. Include oral health in primary care visits.
- Provide interpretation for local languages.** Hire multilingual staff and translate printed materials.
- Change policies.** Provide paid health leave. Change transit routes to pass near dental clinics. Open on evenings and weekends.

## HEALTH

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Get more Coloradans access to healthy food.** Use local institutions in communities of color—libraries, schools—to identify and enroll families in food assistance.
- Redesign food systems.** Invest in local agriculture. Explore co-ops and other new models to locate grocery stores in food deserts.
- Increase economic opportunity in communities of color.** Increase the minimum wage. Expand job training programs. Strengthen the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Fluoridate more water systems.** Water fluoridation protects teeth and every \$1 invested saves \$43 in health care costs.

## EQUITY

### WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Train and recruit more dental providers of color.** Dental training programs can diversify through targeted recruitment, mentoring, and institutional change.
- Understand and interrupt implicit bias.** Ongoing training should be included in every organization's work plan, for every employee.
- Be culturally responsive.** Ongoing training should be included in all dental education and continuing education programs.
- Build trust.** Health care systems throughout history have used and harmed people of color. Invite community members to share experiences and ways to heal.

### DENTAL INSURANCE & VISITS

Whether or not someone has dental insurance has a substantial effect on decisions to seek regular dental care.

**Source:** Colorado Health Institute

**Data:** Colorado Health Access Survey, 2017

### POPULATION ESTIMATES

The state demography office estimates population by a variety of factors.

**Source:** Colorado Department of Local Affairs

**Data:** Race estimates by county, 2017

### DENTAL PROFESSIONAL SHORTAGES

Shortage areas are those with too few dentists to meet community needs.

**Source:** Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

**Data:** Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas, 2015

### CHILDREN'S FOOD SECURITY

Families that rely on only a few kinds of low-cost food are food insecure.

**Source:** Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

**Data:** Colorado Child Health Survey, 2015-2017

### ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS

Coloradans who are low-income and do not live close to a grocery store may struggle to access healthy food.

**Source:** County Health Rankings

**Data:** USDA Food Environment Atlas, 2015

### WATER FLUORIDATION

Water fluoridation is safe and effective but only available to some communities.

**Source:** Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

**Data:** Various studies, 2000 (health), 2005 (savings), 2018 (water status)

### WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

The health care workforce should have similar demographics to the community.

**Source:** Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment, Primary Care Office

**Data:** Dental workforce data, 2018

### (NATIONAL) IMPLICIT BIAS

Implicit bias is the stereotypes or attitudes that unconsciously affect our understanding and decisions.

**Source:** American Journal of Public Health

**Data:** Implicit Racial/Ethnic Bias Among Health Care Professionals and Its Influence on Health Care Outcomes, 2015

### (NATIONAL) TOXIC STRESS & RACISM

Toxic stressors are experiences such as violence or trauma that have long-term health impacts.

**Source:** Harvard School of Public Health

**Data:** Discrimination in America, 2017

At Center for Health Progress, we believe our health care system should work for all Coloradans. So, we bring people together, to ensure factors like race, income, and ZIP Code don't determine a person's access to care and opportunity to live a healthy life. When we uncover commonsense solutions to these complex challenges, we get closer to ensuring our health care system works for everyone.

**Because when our neighbors are healthy, our communities prosper, and Colorado is stronger.**

*Quisiera esta información en español? Comunicarse con nosotros al [weare@centerforhealthprogress.org](mailto:weare@centerforhealthprogress.org)*