

# Rural Oral Health

**In rural areas, residents face many barriers to accessing and receiving proper oral health services.** Oral health is interconnected to overall health, meaning that poor oral health can lead to various health problems. Heart disease, diabetes, and other conditions are closely linked to oral health.

- **Over two-thirds of rural areas are considered dental Health Professional Shortage Areas.**
- **Employers in rural areas are less likely to offer dental insurance than employers in urban areas.**
- **Rural children have poorer dental health outcomes and are less likely to receive preventive dental care than urban children.**
- **34% of rural residents do not have dental insurance coverage, compared to 29% of urban residents.**
- **40% rural adults have not visited the dentist in over a year, compared to 35% of urban adults.**
- **34% of individuals living in rural areas rate their oral health as fair or poor, compared with 27% of urban residents.**

## NRHA's Oral Health Priorities

- **Addressing Rural Declining Life Expectancy and Rural Health Opportunity** including increasing fluoride access, Veteran's access to oral health, and affordability.
- **Reducing Rural Health Care Workforce Shortages** through incentivizing provider recruitment and increasing scope of practice for mid-level providers.
- **Investing in a Strong Rural Safety Net** by establishing full Medicare coverage of dental services, comprehensive Medicaid adult benefit in all states, and modernizing dental care delivery.

# NRHA Supported Legislation

## **S. 1164/H.R. 1397: Increasing Access to Dental Insurance Act**

*Sens. Hassan (D-NH), Marshall (R-KS), Coons (D-DE), Tillis (R-NC), Curtis (R-UT), Shaheen (D-NH), Grassley (R-IA), & Peters (D-MI), Capito (R-WV), & Reps. Miller Meeks (R-IA) & Dingell (R-MI)*

Allows consumers to enroll in standalone dental plans offered through Federal Exchanges.

## **S. 939/H.R. 2045: Medicare Dental, Hearing, and Vision Expansion Act of 2025**

*Sens. Sanders (I-VT) & Reps. Doggett (D-TX)*

Provides comprehensive Medicare coverage of dental, vision, and hearing care.

## **H.R. 935: Health Care Workforce Innovation Act**

*Reps. Garbarino (R-NY), Schrier (D-WA), Valadao (R-CA), Craig (D-MN)*

Establishes and expands partnerships between community health centers, rural health clinics, and educational institutions to attract students to health professions, including careers in oral health.

## **S. 942/H.R. 2028: Resident Education Deferred Interest (REDI) Act**

*Sens. Rosen (D-NV), Boozman (R-AR) & Reps. Babin (R-TX), Houlahan (D-PA)*

Allows medical and dental students to defer student loan payments until after completion of their internships or residency programs.

## **S. 1080/H.R. 1758: Dental Loan Repayment Assistance Act**

*Sens. Wicker (R-MS), Durbin (D-IL) & Reps. Van Drew (R-NJ), Clarke (D-NY)*

Amends the Internal Revenue Code to exclude federally subsidized loan repayments for dental school faculty from taxable gross income in order to boost the recruitment and retention of dental faculty.

## **H.R. 2001: Reauthorization of dental workforce programs**

*Reps. Kelly (D-IL), Simpson (R-ID)*

Address dental workforce needs by reauthorizing grants at the Health Resources and Services Administration to support oral health workforce activities and helping states develop and implement innovative programs to address the dental workforce shortages in Health Professional Shortage Areas.