

Dentist Distribution and Population Dental Need in Washington, 2022

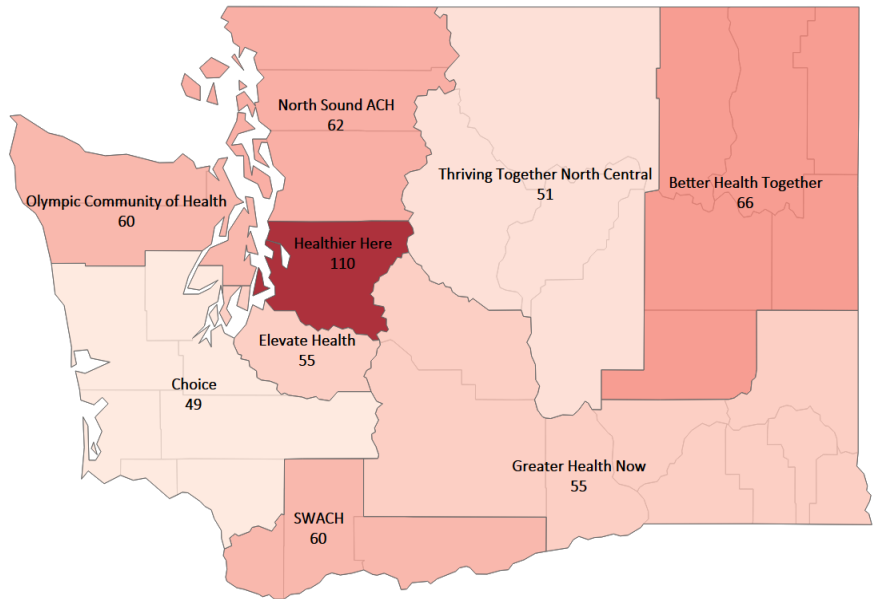
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PURPOSE

Access to oral health care is important for population health. This brief compares the distribution of dentists in Washington with measures of the state population's need for oral health care.

Using Washington state licensure and Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data from 2022, the University of Washington Center for Health Workforce Studies (UW CHWS) Washington Oral Health Workforce Tracking Program (WOHW) compared dentist license address location with BRFSS measures of oral health needs in the state within Accountable Communities of Health (ACH). There are nine ACHs in Washington, each composed of one or more counties and responsible for coordinating community-based healthcare initiatives.

Dentist Licenses with a Washington Mailing Address per 100,000 Population by ACH, 2022

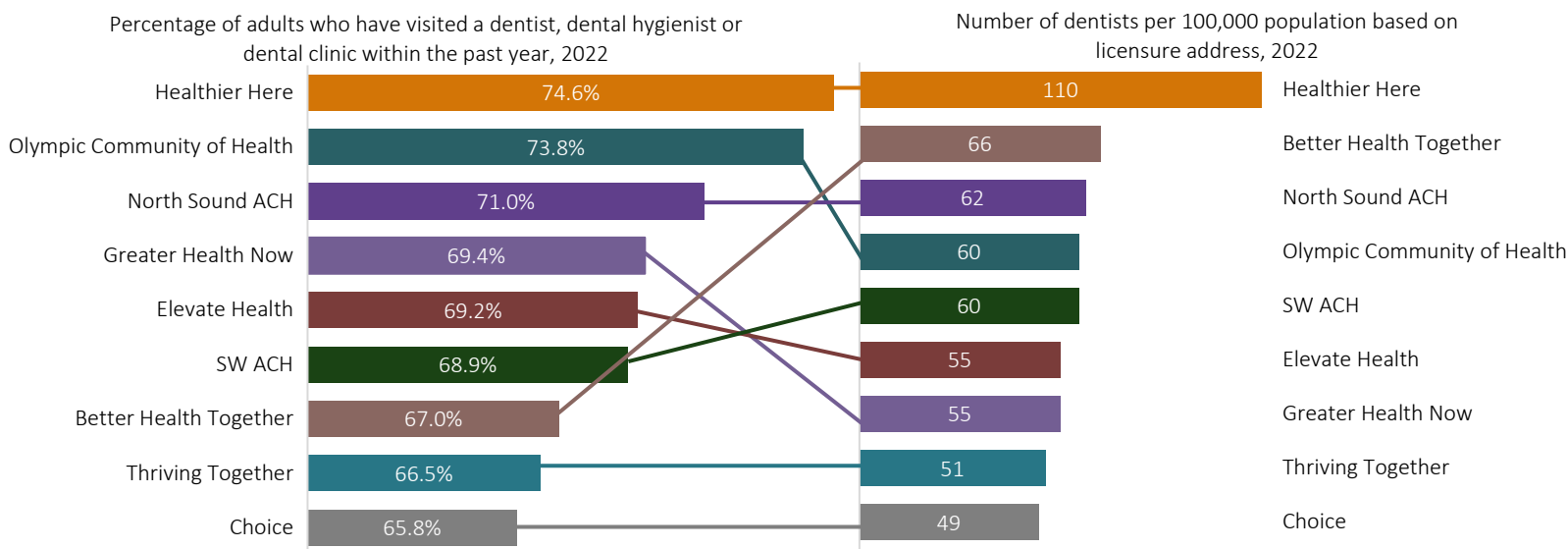


Data Source: Washington State Department of Health.

FINDINGS

The figures below compare ACH rankings of BRFSS oral health access measures with dentist-to-population ratios based on state licenses.

Comparative Ranking of Number Dentists per 100,000 Population and Percentage of Adults Who Visited the Dentist Within the Past Year by ACH, 2022



Data Sources: Washington State Department of Health and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.



Healthier Here, the ACH for King County, had the:

- highest relative number of dentists (130 dentists per 100,000 population)
- highest percentage of adults who had been to the dentist within the past year (74.6%)
- highest percentage of adults with dental insurance coverage (77.4%)

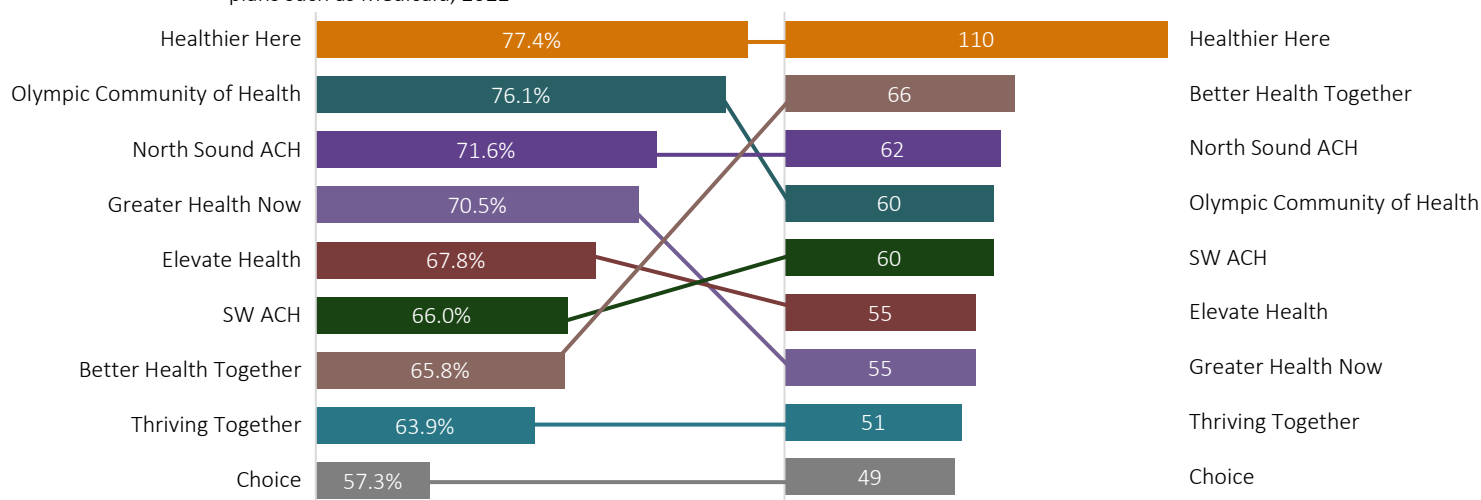
Choice ACH (encompassing Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Lewis, Mason, Thurston, and Wahkiakum counties) had the:

- lowest relative number of dentists (49 per 100,000 population)
- lowest percentage of adults who have visited a dentist within the past year (65.8%)
- lowest percentage of adults with dental insurance coverage (57.3%)

Comparative Ranking of Number Dentists per 100,000 population and Percentage of Population with Insurance Coverage for Routine Dental by ACH, 2022

Percentage of adults who had any kind of insurance coverage that pays for some or all of routine dental care, including dental insurance, prepaid plans such as HMOs, or government plans such as Medicaid, 2022

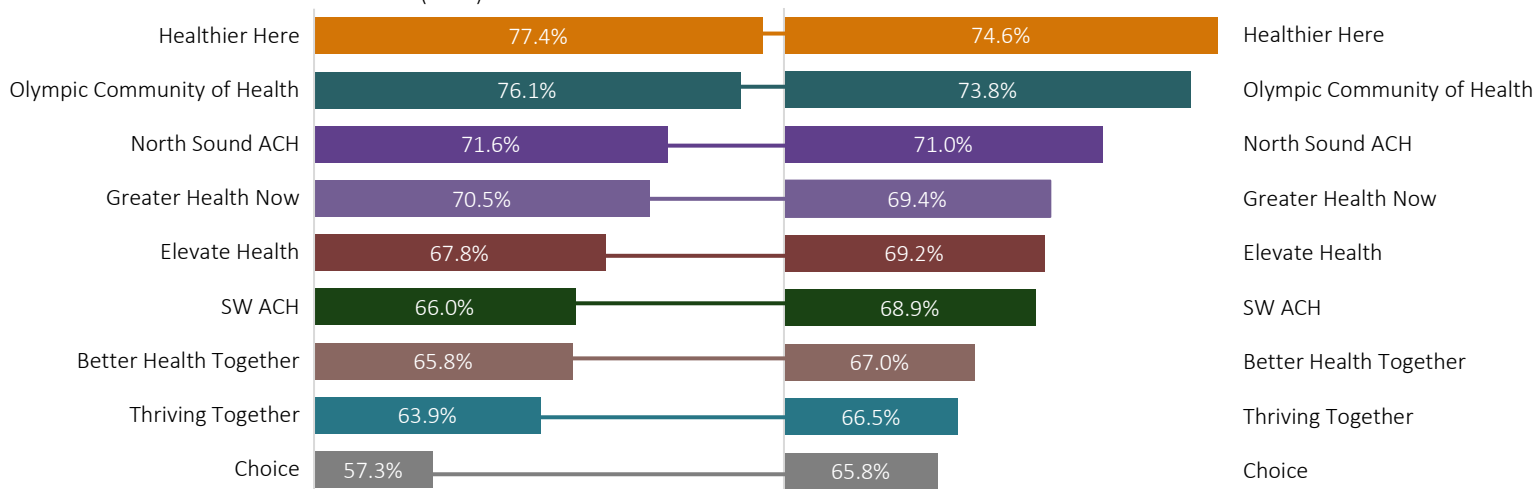
Number of dentists per 100,000 population based on licensure address, 2022



Comparative Ranking of Percentage of Adults Who Visited the Dentist Within the Past Year and Percentage of Adults with Insurance Coverage for Routine Dental by ACH, 2022

Percentage of adults who had any kind of insurance coverage that pays for some or all of routine dental care, including dental insurance, prepaid plans such as HMOs, or government plans such as Medicaid (2022)

Percentage of adults who have visited a dentist, dental hygienist or dental clinic within the past year (2022)



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Dental visits in Washington appear to be correlated with insurance coverage, suggesting increasing access to dental care requires attention to the financing and reimbursement of the services, as well as strengthening the supply and distribution of dentists across the state. Continued focus on enhancing and strengthening the oral health workforce in rural areas of the state, such as in Choice and Thriving Together ACHs, is also important.

As reported by the [Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network](#), it can be difficult to recruit providers to rural areas, and this extends to oral healthcare settings. There are several programs in Washington aimed at addressing the shortage of dental providers in rural areas of the state, including:

- The University of Washington School of Dentistry Regional Initiatives in Dental Education ([RIDE](#)) trains dental students to work in rural and underserved areas.
- The Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic offers a one-year [Northwest Dental Residency Program](#) serving rural communities in eastern Washington.
- A new [School of Dental Medicine](#) is opening at Pacific Northwest University in Yakima with a focus on educating dentists to serve in rural and underserved communities.

Ongoing tracking of data that describes Washington's oral health workforce supply and distribution, as well as updates to information about insurance coverage and access to dental services in the state, are needed to address the population's oral health care needs.

Limitations: There are limitations with the data used for this report. We are not able to determine if the address associated with a dentist's license is where they are currently practicing, or if they are currently practicing. [BRFSS](#) data are collected via a voluntary telephone survey and participation may not be representative of the entire population. BRFSS data does not indicate why people have not visited the dentist in the past or why they lack dental insurance. We also cannot determine if individuals are going to the dentist in the same ACH as where they live.

Data Sources

- **State licensure data:** Using mailing addresses provided in Washington State Department of Health licensure data, we analyzed dentist licenses for 2022. As this data is based on address provided in the dentist license, there is no indication of whether the dentist is actively practicing or practicing in the ZIP code/county of the license address.
- **BRFSS data:** The Washington State Department of Health partners with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to conduct the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), which is a yearly survey and collects data from adults aged 18 years or older. Limitations of the data can be found here: <https://doh.wa.gov/data-and-statistical-reports/data-systems/behavioral-risk-factor-surveillance-system-brfss/brfss-collecting-data>.
- **ACHs:** There are nine ACHs in Washington. Each ACH is composed of one or more counties and is responsible for coordinating healthcare initiatives in the counties it oversees. Although each ACH is unique, they share a common approach to improving the health of their communities and changing health care delivery. Here is a map of the ACHs in Washington State and the counties they represent: <https://www.hca.wa.gov/assets/program/ach-map.pdf>. For more information on ACHs: <https://www.hca.wa.gov/about-hca/programs-and-initiatives/medicaid-transformation-project-mtp/accountable-communities-health-achs>.

The Washington Oral Health Workforce (WOHW) Tracking Program, is supported by Delta Dental of Washington and the Washington State Legislature. WOHW provides critical data to improve workforce development in oral health and guide practice and policy to help ensure the state's population has access to needed oral health care.

More information can be found at: <https://familymedicine.uw.edu/chws/resources/wohw/>.

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