

## DESCRIPTION

Oral health is essential to the health of the whole person. Oral health hygiene involving twice daily brushing and flossing is key to a healthy mouth and smile. Poor oral health can lead to poor self-esteem, barriers to employment, malnutrition, increased risk for heart disease, pre-term or low-birth weight births and other physical and emotional health problems.<sup>1</sup> At their most severe, oral health problems lead to debilitating pain and even death. A regular dental checkup can help prevent and treat oral health problems that cause poor attendance at work or school, behavioral problems and an inability to concentrate.

## HOW WE ARE DOING

Ramsey County and Minnesota exceed the Healthy People 2020 goal of 49 percent of children, adolescents and adults visiting a dentist.<sup>2</sup> However, compared to statewide rates, Ramsey County adults and adolescents are less likely to see a dentist regularly. Ramsey County adults are less likely than adolescents to get regular dental checkups.

### BENCHMARK INDICATOR

Healthy People 2020: Increase the proportion of children, adolescents, and adults who used the oral health care system in the past year.  
U.S. Target: 49 percent.

## DISPARITIES

People of color, with disabilities, other health problems, limited education and low income are more at risk for oral health problems. Barriers to care such as limited availability of dentists accepting Medical Assistance, lack of awareness of the role of oral health care in overall health, high cost and fear of dental procedures contribute to these disparities.<sup>1</sup>

## RISK FACTORS

Oral health hygiene and a healthy diet with calcium-rich foods and water as the main beverage choice is critical for good oral health. Environmental factors like living in a food desert make purchasing healthy foods more challenging. Tobacco, alcohol and drug use greatly increases the risk of cavities, gum disease and oral cancers.<sup>3</sup> Chronic diseases like diabetes are both a risk factor for poor oral health conditions and can become made worse by cavities and gum disease.<sup>3</sup>

## WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

In 2014, Ramsey County received the honor of being named an Oral Health Zone through the National Children's Oral Health Foundation. Partnerships with faith-based organizations, schools, parks and recreation centers, child care programs and others have supported the county in educating over 6,000 individuals about correct oral health. The Ramsey County Child and Teen Checkups program offers families who are insured through a Minnesota public insurance program help finding a dental clinic, arranging transportation or scheduling an interpreter for visits.

## Information to note

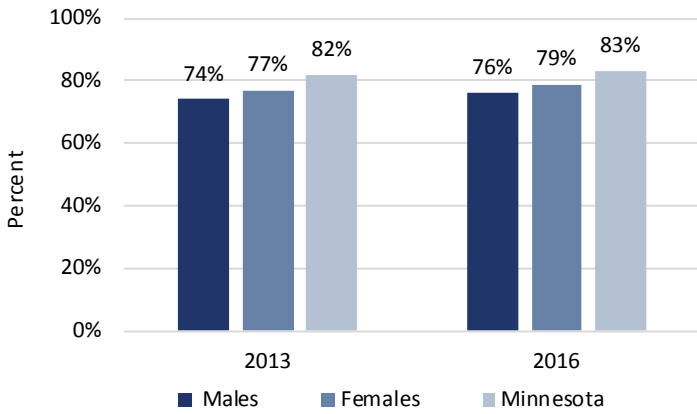
- Ramsey County residents are less likely to regularly visit a dentist compared to other Minnesotans.
- There are striking disparities related to regular dental care.
- Partnerships with faith-based organizations, schools, parks and rec centers, child care programs and others have helped Ramsey County educate over 6,000 individuals about oral health.

<sup>1</sup> Oral Health. Minnesota Department of Health. <https://apps.health.state.mn.us/mndata/oral-health>. Accessed July 24, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Oral Health. Healthy People 2020. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/oral-health/objectives>. Accessed July 24, 2017.

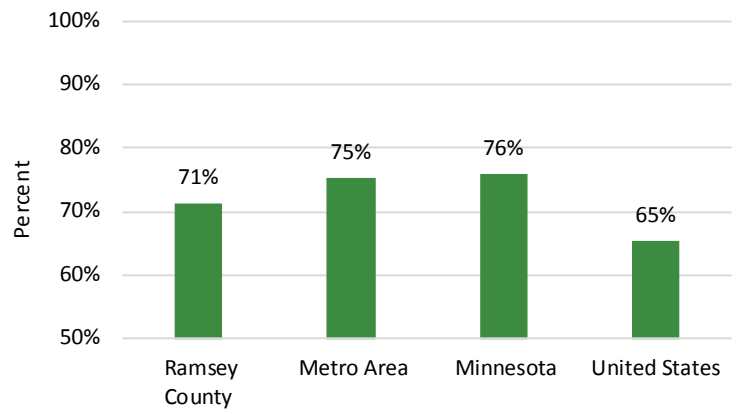
<sup>3</sup> The Status of Oral Health in Minnesota. Minnesota Department of Health. 2013. <https://www.astdd.org/docs/mn-third-grade-bss-2013.pdf>. Published September 2013. Accessed August 2018.

9th Graders Who Visited a Dentist During the Past Year, Ramsey County



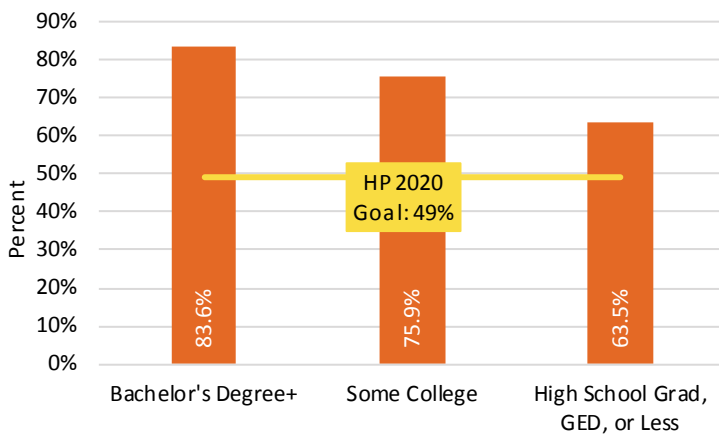
Source: Minnesota Student Survey

Adults Ages 18+ Who Visited a Dentist in Past Year, 2012



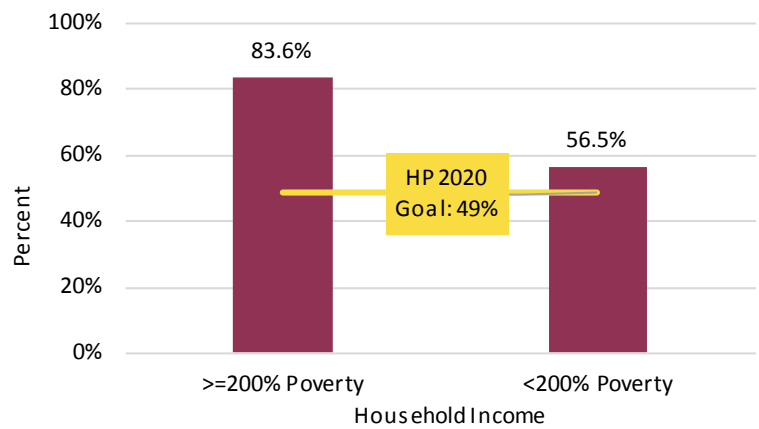
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).<sup>4</sup>

Visited Dentist within Past Year, Six County Metro Adults Ages 25+, 2014



Source: Metro Public Health Analyst Network. Metro SHAPE 2014 Six County Data Book.<sup>5</sup>

Visited Dentist within Past Year, Six County Metro Adults Ages 25+, 2014



Source: Metro Public Health Analyst Network. Metro SHAPE 2014 Six County Data Book.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Metro Public Health Analyst Network. Metro SHAPE Six County Data Book 2014. <https://www.ramseycounty.us/your-government/open-government/research-data/public-health-data>. Accessed August 2017.