

Dental Education and Factors Associated with Medicaid Pediatric Dental Participation

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ISSUE

While access to dental care for children enrolled in Medicaid has grown steadily, Medicaid children still face greater access barriers than privately-insured children. It is important to understand factors associated with whether dentists participate in Medicaid, including factors associated with their dental school training.

METHODS

We analysed American Dental Association data about 22,550 practicing general and pediatric dentists, active in 2016, who graduated from dental school 5 to 10 years before. We analysed data about their dental schools, their current practice characteristics and the states where they practice to identify correlates of accepting Medicaid patients.

FINDINGS

Fifty-five percent of dentists accepted Medicaid in at least one practice site, while 24% accepted Medicaid in all their sites. Dentists who attended public dental schools or schools with lower tuition rates and more financial aid were more likely to serve Medicaid patients several years later. Those attending schools that received HRSA dental training grants that encourage community-based training also had higher Medicaid participation. Higher Medicaid dental reimbursement rates were associated with increased Medicaid participation in at least one practice site. Practicing in a rural area was associated with higher Medicaid participation. Participation in a dental service organization and practicing in the same state where the dentist attended school yielded mixed results.

DISCUSSION

Multiple factors, including dental training, current practice characteristics and state Medicaid policies, are associated with increased willingness to serve Medicaid patients. HRSA dental training grants appear to encourage dental students to serve needy patients, including Medicaid children. Lower tuition or more financial aid may also help. Higher Medicaid dental reimbursement is also associated with higher Medicaid participation.

Key Words:

Dentists, Medicaid, pediatric dental care, dental education, health workforce