Where Oral Health Needs Are Greatest in New York State

Key Findings from the Oral Health Needs Assessment

Statewide Findings at a Glance

2.8 Million New Yorkers–about 14 percent of the state's population–live in communities with the most severe barriers to dental care

Rural regions face the greatest and most concentrated oral health access challenges, with some rural areas having over 80% of residents in high need communities

Provider shortages, particularly in rural areas, are a leading driver of unmet oral health needs.

About the Oral Health Needs Assessment

The *Oral Health Needs Assessment for New York State* is a comprehensive, data-driven picture of where oral health needs are most severe and what is driving those needs.

What Is Driving Oral Health Need Statewide

Workforce shortages, including severe shortages of dentists and dental hygienists

Disability, with higher barriers to accessing dental care

Education, where lower educational attainment is linked to poorer oral health outcomes

Pregnancy, with high unmet need for dental care during pregnancy

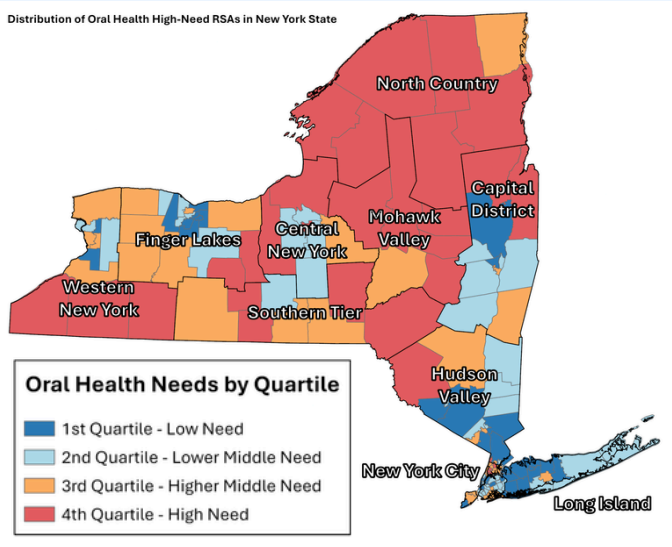
Poverty, creating economic barriers to preventive and routine care

How the Assessment Was Conducted

To analyze oral health needs across New York, researchers from the Center for Health Workforce Studies divided the state into 151 service areas defined by shared population characteristics, realistic access to care, and contiguous boundaries. Each service area was then evaluated using 15 indicators. Each area received a composite score based on performance across all indicators:

- Five sociodemographic factors: poverty, education, disability, pregnancy, and age.
- Ten oral health indicators, including dentist and hygienist availability, access to fluoridated water, disease rates, and preventive care use.

These composite scores were then used to rank all areas across the state.*



Understanding How Areas Are Ranked

What this ranking means:

- Low Need: Fewer barriers to care
- Lower Middle Need: Generally good access with some challenges
- Higher Middle Need: Significant access barriers
- High Need: Most severe oral health access barriers statewide

The groupings show how each area compares to others across the state. Service areas in lower groups (1st and 2nd quartiles) still have oral health needs and residents who face barriers to care. The ranking system identifies where needs are most acute and barriers are most severe relative to other areas. This approach helps prioritize where resources and interventions are needed most.

*Regions are the NYS Economic Development Regions

Source: Center for Health Workforce Studies, University at Albany. Oral Health Needs Assessment for New York State, 2024.