Children's Oral Health Network of Maine

2023 DENTAL CLAIMS DATA UPDATE 2017-2023 TRENDS

Dental Services Among Children with MaineCare and Commercial Dental Benefits

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

1. About 3 out of 10 children and youth in Maine under age 21 had either no dental coverage in 2023 or had MaineCare or commercial dental benefits for only part of the year. While the COVID-19 pandemic universally disrupted access to oral health care, the number of children with consistent insurance has steadily increased statewide since 2017. Examining data collected over the period of 2017-2023 reveals noteworthy trends in insurance coverage for children:
    - From 2017-2019, the number of MaineCare-enrolled children declined from about 93,000 to about 89,000 while the number of commercially-enrolled children increased from about 67,000 to about 79,000.
    - The pandemic changed this pattern; in 2020 there were over 101,000 children enrolled in MaineCare, which increased to more than 123,500 by 2023. The 2020 drop in commercially insured children to about 70,000 rebounded to more than 86,000 in 2023.
    - This means that in 2023, there were about 210,000 children with consistent dental coverage compared to about 165,000 in 2017, representing a 27% increase in the number of consistently-insured children.
2. Prevention utilization rates have remained steady or increased slightly since 2020, with rates for commercially insured children rebounding more quickly than rates for MaineCare-enrolled children.
    - Because of the increase in the overall numbers of insured children, a flat rate trend in utilization reflects more children accessing care. However, there are also more insured children who are not accessing care in spite of having insurance coverage. In 2017, 52,021 MaineCare-enrolled children received at least one preventive dental service; in 2023, that number increased by only 24 children, while the total number of MaineCare-enrolled children has increased by almost 30,500.
3. Across childhood, access to preventive dental care peaks at age 6-12 (74% for commercially-insured children and 53% for those with MaineCare), and drops precipitously for older youth. The group that experiences the lowest rate of preventive care is 19-20-year olds with MaineCare, at 18%.

Introduction

Dental disease is the most widespread chronic disease in children with 40% of children ages 2-19 experiencing dental caries.[1,2] A 2023 report released by the American Academy of Pediatrics states that although dental visits rates in the U.S. are increasing across all ages, race and geographic categories, significant disparities still exist in children accessing dental care. Challenges that prevent families from accessing routine dental care include lack of insurance, provider shortages, scheduling and transportation challenges, fear, distance, poverty, lack of experience with the dental system, and language barriers.[2]

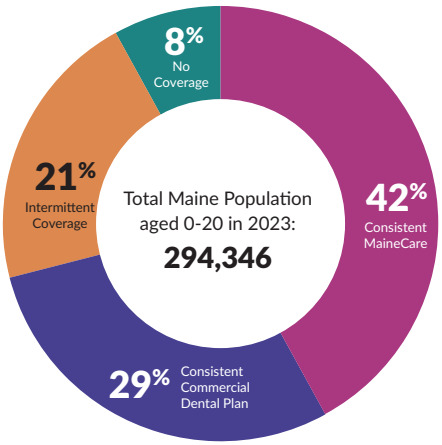
Dental disease is driven by a combination of environmental, physiological, genetic, and behavioral factors and is largely preventable with early intervention.[3] If left untreated, dental disease will progress and can cause pain, inflammation, infection, impaired speech, and nutritional deficits. Children with dental caries also experience more missed school days and lower academic performance when compared to their peers.[4]

This annual data brief explores dental coverage and dental claims rates from the Maine Health Data Organization's All-Payer Claims Database for children under age 21 who were covered by MaineCare or commercial dental insurance from 2017 to 2023. MaineCare covers comprehensive dental benefits for children under age 21, based on federal Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment requirements and the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry's periodicity schedule.[5] Commercial insurers generally follow similar standards; however, covered procedures, annual caps, and family copays/coinsurance costs vary by insurance plan (see Method Notes for a description of the dental insurance claims data and analysis parameters).

Dental Coverage

To prevent and treat dental disease, routine access to dental care is necessary. For many families, dental insurance helps increase access to dental care. As seen in **Figure 1**, approximately 42% (n= 123,627) of children under the age of 21 had MaineCare for at least 11 months in 2023, while 29% (n = 86,164) were consistently enrolled in a commercial dental plan. Additionally, approximately 21% had either MaineCare or a commercial dental plan for part of the year (less than 11-months). Approximately 8% of Maine children had neither MaineCare nor commercial dental benefits during 2023. (Note: within this no-coverage category there may be some children who had benefits with a small dental plan that is under the threshold for the requirement to submit claims data to Maine Health Data Organization.)

Figure 1. **Maine Children Under Age 21 by type of Dental Coverage in 2023**



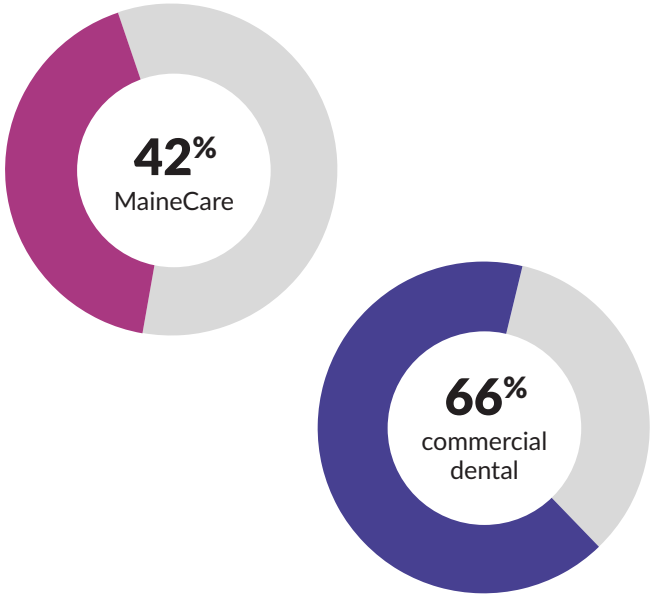
Source: 2023 dental claims data from the Maine Health Data Organization's All-Payer Claims Database. Population denominator from 2023 ACS population estimates.

Preventive Dental Services*

**Note: The following analysis is limited to children continuously enrolled in a commercial dental plan or MaineCare for at least 11 months in 2023.*

Utilization of preventive services for Maine children with dental benefits varies by insurance type. As seen in **Figure 2**, a higher percentage of children under age 21 with consistent commercial dental benefits (66%) had at least one preventive dental claim in 2023 than children with consistent MaineCare (42%).

Figure 2. **Percentage of Consistently Insured Children Under Age 21 with At Least One Preventive Dental Claim in 2023**



Source: 2023 dental claims data from the Maine Health Data Organization's All-Payer Claims Database

Author's Note

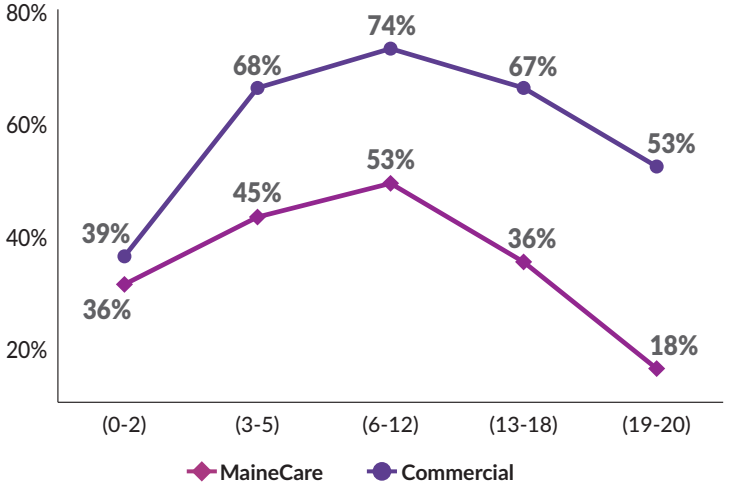
The purpose of this document is to help build a common understanding of the status of children's oral health services, as well as the gaps in these services. Oral health is a complex issue and many partners are working hard to help children get the services they need. Our hope is that this data brief will inspire collective action toward our ***shared vision****: Transforming Maine into a state where all children grow up free from preventable dental disease.*

Age and Preventive Dental Care

As seen in **Figure 3**, across all age groups, a higher percentage of children with commercial dental benefits had at least one preventive dental claim than children with MaineCare. The age group with the highest percentage of children with any preventive dental claims was 6-12-year-olds for both MaineCare (53%) and commercial coverage (74%). The 19-20-year-old age group demonstrated the largest disparity in preventive claims with a rate of 53% among 19-20-year-olds with consistent commercial dental benefits compared to 18% among those with consistent MaineCare.

It is important to note that this data reflects only services that are paid for by either MaineCare or commercial dental insurance plans. Some children receive screening and fluoride varnish through the State of Maine's School Oral Health Program, or donated care for which providers are not reimbursed. In addition, one preventive dental service within a year is not necessarily an indicator of having consistent access to a dental provider, nor does it mean a child received all recommended routine dental care services.

Figure 3. **Percentage of Consistently Insured Children That Had at Least One Preventive Dental Claim by Age Group**

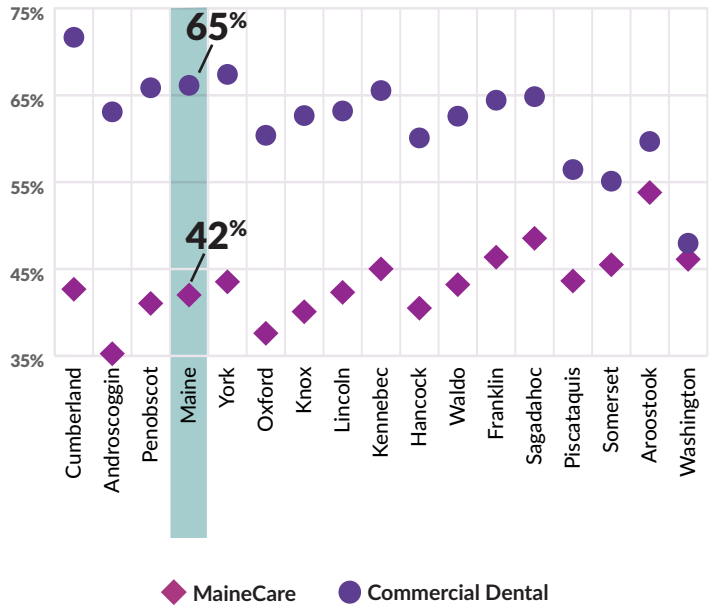


Source: 2023 dental claims data from the Maine Health Data Organization's All-Payer Claims Database

Preventive Dental Care by County

Access to dental care varies across the state. As seen in **Figure 4**, in 2023 the largest difference between the percentage of MaineCare and commercially-insured residents under age 21 with at least one preventive dental claim was in Cumberland, Androscoggin, and Penobscot counties. Somerset, Aroostook, and Washington counties had the smallest disparities based on insurance. Cumberland County had the highest rate of children with commercial dental insurance receiving preventive care, while Aroostook and Sagadahoc Counties had the highest rate for children with MaineCare.

Figure 4. **Disparities in Preventive Dental Care by County for Consistently Insured Children Under Age 21**



Source: 2023 dental claims data from the Maine Health Data Organization's All-Payer Claims Database

Note: graph formatting attributable to the American Dental Association Health Policy Institute's dental care use among children.

RESOURCES / Weblinks for more information about MaineCare dental benefits and other oral health data:

Maine Health Data Organization All-Payer Claims Database: mhdo.maine.gov/claims.htm

MaineCare Benefits Manual, Chapter II – Specific Policies by Service. Section 25: www.maine.gov/sos/sites/maine.gov.sos/files/inline-files/c2s025%20-%20JUL%202025.docx

MaineCare Children's Services – Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT): www.maine.gov/dhhs/oms/providers/childrens-services

KidsCount Maine: datacenter.aecf.org/data?location=ME#USA/1/0/char/0

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Oral Health Data: www.cdc.gov/oralhealthdata/

Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors: www.astdd.org/data-collection-assessment-and-surveillance-committee/

American Dental Association Health Policy Institute: www.ada.org/en/science-research/health-policy-institute

CareQuest, the State of Oral Health Equity in America, 2023: www.carequest.org/resource-library/hour-need-productivity-time-lost-due-urgent-oral-health-needs

National Institute for Cranial and Dental Research, Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges, 2021 www.nidcr.nih.gov/oralhealthinamerica

Utilization And Trends 2017-2023

The trends in dental claims held steady from 2017-2019 with a precipitous drop off in 2020. From 2021 to 2023, as seen in **Figures 5 and 6**, there has been a gradual rebound in preventive dental or any dental claim utilization rates for children with commercial insurance. The rates for children with consistent MaineCare insurance have not similarly recovered. Claims data indicates that in 2023 dental care utilization remains well below pre-pandemic rates for both insurance types. These trends reveal the need for increased collaboration and coordinated effort to address the concerning disparities between children with MaineCare and children with commercial dental insurance and to accelerate the recovery of dental care utilization.

All graphs on this page represent rates among children who had either MaineCare or commercial dental insurance for at least 11 months of the year indicated.

Figure 5. **Percentage of Consistently Insured Children Under Age 21 with at least one Preventive Dental Claim in 2017-2023**

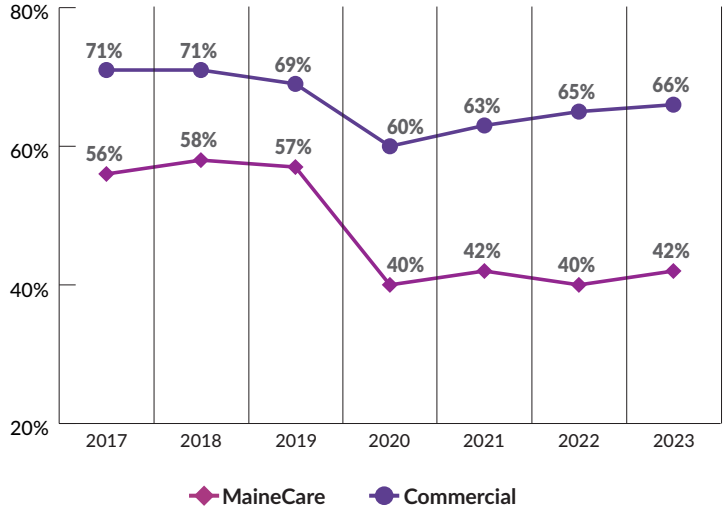


Figure 6. **Percentage of Consistently Insured Children Under Age 21 with at least one Dental Claim (any type of dental service) in 2017-2023**

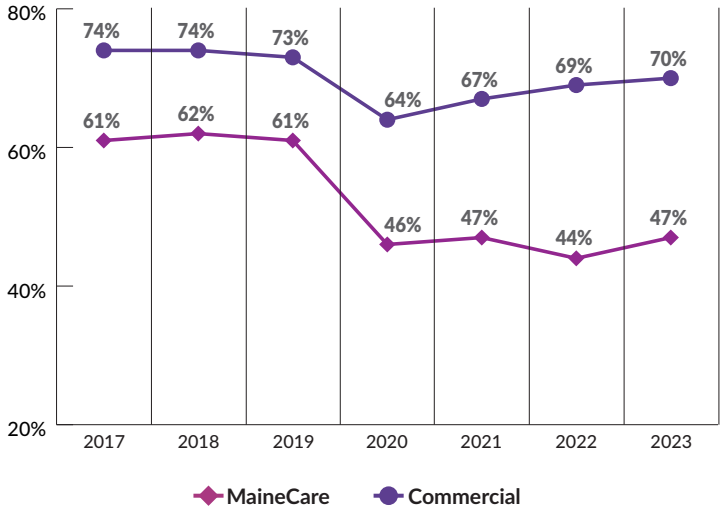


Figure 5, 6, 7, and 8 Source: 2017-2023 dental claims data from the Maine Health Data Organization's All-Payer Claims Database

Figure 7. **Percentage of Children with MaineCare with at least one Preventive Dental Claim by age group in 2017-2023**

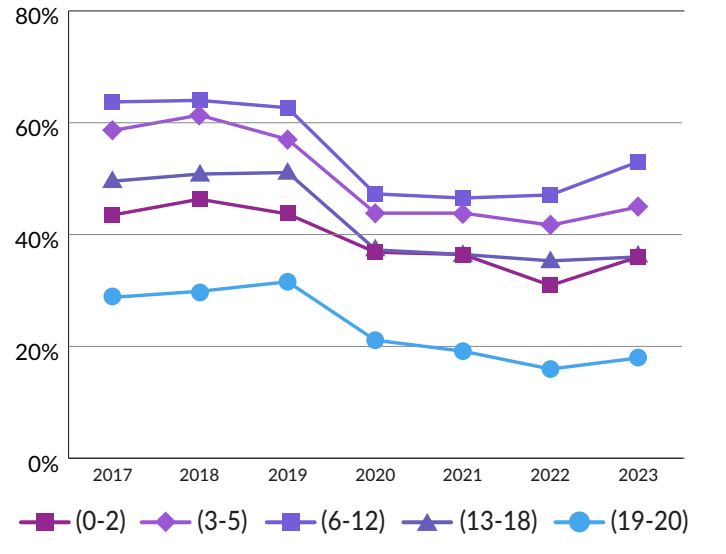
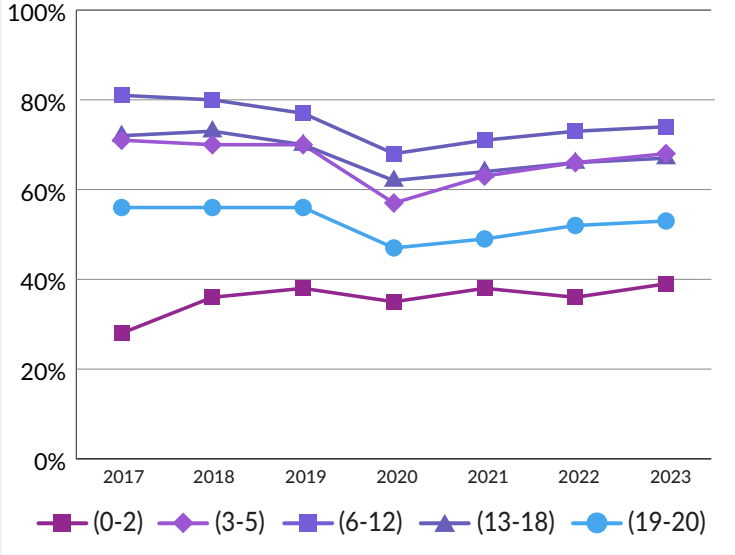


Figure 8. **Percentage of Children with Commercial Dental Insurance with at least one Preventive Dental Claim by age group in 2017-2023**



Method Notes

Data was obtained from the Maine Health Data Organization's All Payer Claims Database (APCD) per the data release requirements defined in 90-590 Chapter 120, *Release of Data to the Public*, to provide a snapshot of dental services being delivered in Maine in 2017 through 2023 by insurance type (MaineCare, Commercial), Age (0-21), and location (county).

The Maine Health Data Organization is a state agency that collects healthcare claims data from payors, including Medicaid, commercial insurance carriers, and dental benefit administrators, per the requirements in 90-590 Chapter 243, *Uniform Reporting System for Health Care Claims Data Sets*. Please refer to the MHDO website for more details regarding data restrictions and represented insurers.

Using Current Dental Terminology (CDT) codes, descriptive statistics were analyzed using Excel by the University of Southern Maine's Catherine Cutler Institute. The APCD dental claims data were restricted from the total to only include individuals with MaineCare (2017: n=93,175, 2018: n=90,411, 2019: n=88,995, 2020: n=101,064, 2021: n=114,702, 2022: n=123,374, 2023: n=123,627), or commercial insurance (2017: n=72,581, 2018: n=76,687, 2019: n=78,902, 2020: n=70,146, 2021: n=82,841, 2022: n=82,942, 2023: n=86,164) dental coverage for 11 consecutive months. This was done to capture patterns of routine care that are associated with consistently covered individuals. Given that only consistently covered individuals were included, the results do not reflect all individuals with dental insurance that received services in 2017 through 2023.

This analysis includes only services which were covered by MaineCare or commercial dental insurance plans. It does not include services which were paid for by families, medical insurance, the State of Maine School Oral Health Program, grant-funded programs, or donated care.

The denominator for the total population of children ages 0-20 for Figure 1 was derived from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (Table DP05).

The descriptive statistics in these tables represent state averages, county averages, and averages for various age ranges. Age ranges are defined by the following: under age 21 is defined as individuals up to age 20 years 364 days; 0-2: birth until age 2 and 364 days; 3-5: age 3 until age 5 and 364 days; 6-12: age 6 until age 12 and 364 days; 13-18: age 13 until age 18 and 364 days; 19-20: age 19 until age 20 and 364 days.

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