Mortality rates from the novel coronavirus are disproportionately high for people of color, generating a vigorous dialogue about health disparities in America. Lacking meaningful medical and dental insurance is one example of how Black and Latino adults can be uniquely vulnerable when a health-related crisis arrives.

Access to routine dental care is limited for many Americans, and low-income adults face a particular challenge because of the cost of care or a lack of coverage through Medicaid or Medicare. Lacking access to preventive services, these Americans are less likely to maintain good oral health. Newly released data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination (NHANES) survey (2017-18) reveals that oral health inequities persist. See full results from the DentaQuest Partnership’s analysis of unplanned dental visits, trends over time, and inequities by race and income.

**NEW ORAL HEALTH DATA REFLECT INEQUITIES, BARRIERS**

TOP REASONS FOR UNPLANNED DENTAL VISITS

- **63%** of the population had a dental visit within the past 12 months;
  - nearly **1 in 13** of these visits were for unplanned dental services due to pain or another problem.

- **Nearly 1 in 4** dental visits made by those in “near poor” families were unplanned due to pain or another problem.
  - People in these families were **more than twice as likely** as high-income families to have an unplanned dental visit.

UNMET DENTAL NEEDS ARE COMMON AND HAVE A PROFOUND IMPACT

- Americans living in poverty are **2.2x more likely** than those at higher incomes to have unmet dental needs due to lack of insurance coverage.

- Those living in poverty are **102x more likely** to have difficulty doing their job because of oral health conditions and they are **215x more likely** to have oral pain than those at high incomes.
RACIAL DISPARITIES PERSIST IN ACCESS TO ORAL HEALTH

Black adults are 22% less likely than White adults to have had a routine dental visit in the past year.

68%

Black adults are 68% more likely than White adults to have unmet dental needs.

52%

Latino adults are 52% more likely than White adults to report having difficulty doing their job very often or fairly often due to poor oral health.

LACK OF DENTAL INSURANCE COVERAGE MATTERS

Whether people see a dentist is affected by their awareness that certain procedures are not covered by their public or private insurance.

2013-14

2%

2017-18

4%

The percentage of Americans who cited this factor has doubled since 2013-14.

Nearly 4 in 10 Black and Latino adults reside in one of the 14 states where Medicaid’s adult dental benefits cover no services or emergency-only care.

A lack of access to dental care, due to COVID-19 closures, may lead to increased hospital emergency departments (EDs) visits, which are currently under tremendous stress in many communities due to the influx of COVID-19 patients.

SUGGESTED CITATION:
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