The proportion of FQHC patients receiving any specific oral health services decreased from 2019 to 2020.

- Largest declines were for patients receiving oral prophylaxis treatments (-33.1% change)
- Proportion of patients receiving emergency services increased by 13.0%
- The Northeast and the West were particularly affected (results not presented)

Study findings indicate a concerning reduction in oral health staffing nationwide at FQHCs, particularly among dental hygienists.

Results indicate that the average number of oral health providers at FQHCs decreased from 17.7 FTEs in 2019 to 15.8 FTEs in 2020 (-11.0% change). The decrease in the oral health providers at FQHCs was highest in the Northeast (-15.3% change) and the West (-11.8% change).

- Dental hygienists were affected most, especially in the Northeast (-21.8% change; results not presented)

These results are dramatically different from findings published in our previous report that showed increasing trends in direct oral health services and staffing at FQHCs in 2011-2014.

Implications for Policy and Practice

- These study results, especially those showing decreases in emergency services, suggest the importance of ongoing support for FQHCs as public health resources and essential safety-net providers.

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Oral Health Workforce Research Center • Center for Health Workforce Studies • School of Public Health • University at Albany

**Background**

- The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the oral health delivery system in the US, particularly in workforce composition.
- Temporary postponement of health services beginning in March 2020 had lasting impacts on all medical and dental providers, particularly those working in Medicaid or residing in rural areas.
- Safety-net organizations were established to meet the health care needs of vulnerable populations such as racial/ethnic minorities, low-income, uninsured, and those enrolled in Medicaid or residing in rural areas.
- Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) are the most prominent provider organizations within the US health-care safety-net.

**Methods**

- **Data Sources:** Uniform Data System, 2019-2020. Bureau of Primary Health Care, HRSA.
- **Data Analysis:** A logistic regression model with robust standard errors was used to estimate odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals for associations between FQHCs providing direct oral health services and state-level factors including (1) Medicaid fee-for-service reimbursement as a percentage of private dental benefit plan charges, (2) dental hygiene professional practice index, (3) adult dental services, (4) Medicaid coverage policy for adults, and (5) State scope of practice for dental hygienists.

**Results**

- Nationwide, the number of FQHCs decreased from 1,352 in 2019 to 1,342 in 2020.
- The proportion of FQHCs providing dental care was similar in 2019 (57.4%) as during the first year of the pandemic in 2020 (57.8%).
- There were small differences in the proportion of FQHCs providing dental care between 2019 and 2020 across regions, ranging from 0.3% change in the West to 1.5% change in the South.

- Nationwide, the proportion of FQHC patients who received any oral health services decreased from 2019 to 2020.
- Largest declines were for patients receiving oral prophylaxis treatments (-33.1% change).
- Proportion of patients receiving emergency services increased by 13.0%.
- The Northeast and the West were particularly affected (results not presented).

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- Study findings indicate a concerning reduction in oral health staffing at FQHCs, particularly among dental hygienists.

- These results are dramatically different from findings published in our previous report that showed increasing trends in direct oral health services and staffing at FQHCs in 2011-2014.

- Implications for Policy and Practice

- These study results, especially those showing decreases in emergency services, suggest the importance of ongoing support for FQHCs as public health resources and essential safety-net providers.

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**Implications for Policy and Practice**

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**References**


**Tables**

- TABLE 1. Proportion of FQHCs Providing Oral Health Services by Region and State Characteristics Nationwide, 2019-2020

**FIGURES**

- FIGURE 1. Oral Health Staffing at FQHCs by Region and Nativewide, 2019-2020

- FIGURE 2. Proportion of Patients Who Received Oral Health Services at FQHCs by Category of Service Nationwide, 2019-2020