

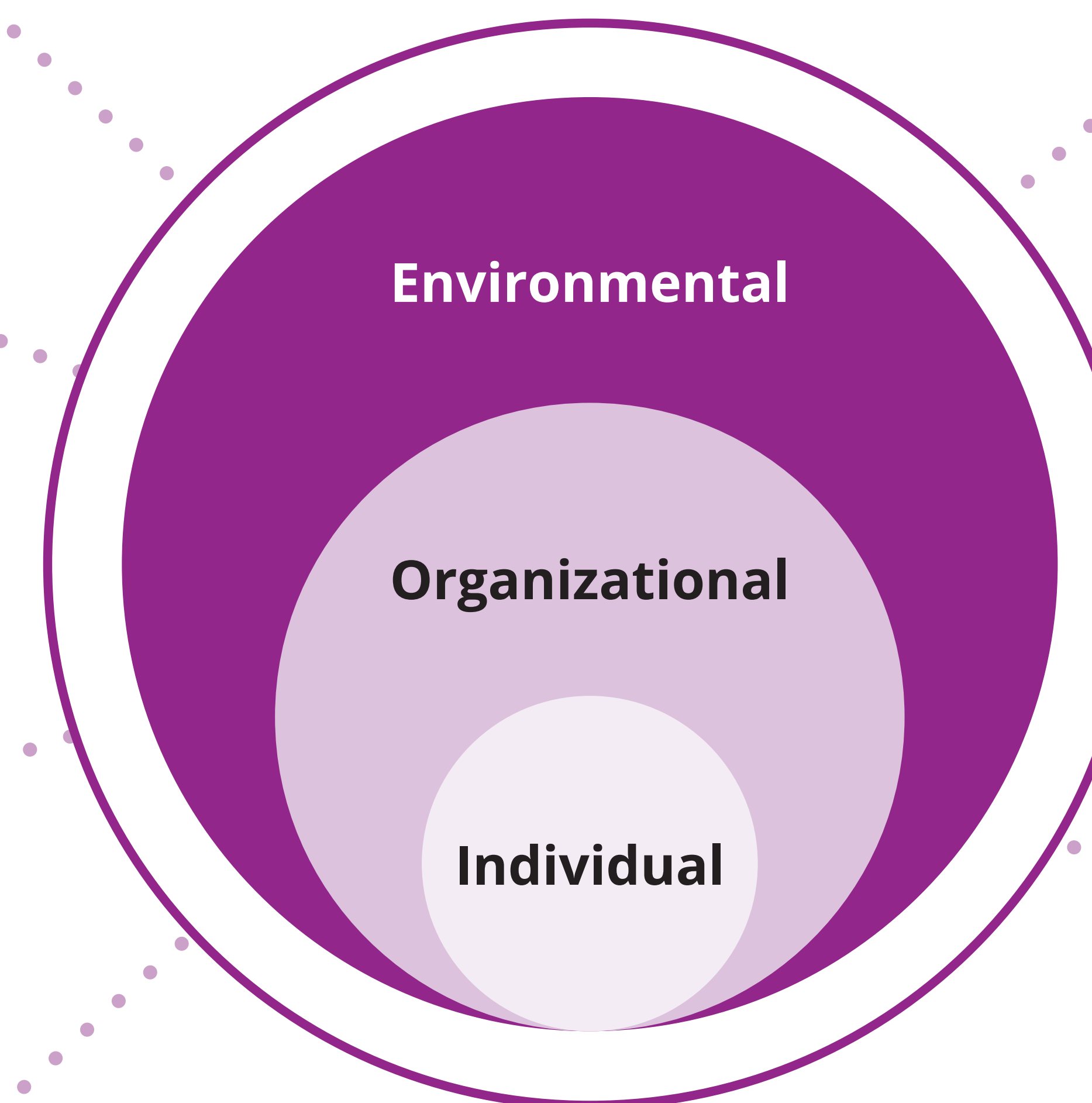
Oral Health Workforce Research Center • Center for Health Workforce Studies • School of Public Health • University at Albany

- COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the oral health care delivery system in the US
- Temporary postponement of health services beginning in March/ April 2020 had lasting impacts on all medical and dental providers, but especially on those in the safety-net
- Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) were particularly affected as safety-net providers
- Though most dental practices re-opened by July 2020 (with 90% at pre-pandemic staffing levels¹ and 70% at pre-pandemic patient volume levels)², a survey of dentists in public health settings such as FQHCs found that these practices were not rebounding as quickly as those in the private sector

- To describe challenges posed by the pandemic on the ability of safety-net providers to deliver care to underserved communities
- To identify strategies that enabled care delivery during the initial challenging months of 2020

- Between May and September 2022, interviews were conducted with 26 staff in various positions at 11 safety-net dental organizations, 9 of which were FQHCs (2 from New York; 3 from California; 1 each from Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Maryland/DC) (Figure 1)
- National Network for Oral Health Access (NNOHA) helped identify safety-net organizations to participate
- Researchers interviewed 26 key informants (2 CEO/Executive Directors, 6 non-clinical directors, 9 clinical directors, 2 dentists, 4 dental hygienists, 1 dental assistant, 2 administrative staff) about the impact of the pandemic on oral health service delivery and patients' access to dental services
- All interview transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose V.9.0 for coding and analysis

- Prior experience with mobile and portable dentistry facilitated swift adoption and expansion of teledentistry
- Teledentistry was especially important for nursing home patients who were under strict visitation restrictions
- A few organizations changed from providing portable dentistry services in schools to using mobile dental vans outside of schools



- Disruption of care was immediate and precipitous at the onset of the pandemic yet the return to “normal” operations was much slower, more methodical, and challenging due to guidance and regulations which were continually being updated
- The pandemic affected the safety-net, creating greater dental staffing shortages, particularly for dental hygienists and assistants
- Interviews revealed that many organizations were proven to be both resilient and adaptable
- COVID-19 was a catalyst to move strategic planning in organizations in a new direction so that safety-net providers can continue to meet the needs of their patient communities over the long term

1. American Dental Association (ADA). Health Policy Institute. COVID-19: economic impact on dental practices. Accessed August 26, 2021. <https://www.ada.org/en/science-research/health-policy-institute/covid-19-dentists-economic-impact>.
2. American Dental Association (ADA). Health Policy Institute. Will COVID-19 weaken the dental care safety net. September 2020. https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada-ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/hpi_covid_webinar_sept_2020_1.pdf?rev=89fa6e17019b46e7bc0411834376a013&hash=B7D4E412C58AE3556CB5EDBE1C-EB37D6

OHWRC is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$450,000 with 0% financed with nongovernmental sources. The content of this presentation are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by, HRSA, HHS, or the US government. For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov).

