

# Oral Health Services Provided and the Perceived Barriers to Providing Services in LTC Facilities

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## Introduction

Oral health is a significant concern for nursing and basic care residents. There is poor overall oral hygiene, a high level of needed care, and low utilization of care rates among the elderly. Rural communities generally have older populations and also have increased occurrences of dental caries, reduced access to preventive care, and poorer oral health outcomes than urban counterparts. Researchers partnered with the North Dakota Long Term Care Association, the North Dakota Department of Health Oral Health Program, and the North Dakota Dental Association to identify oral health services provided, and barriers to care, among rural and urban long-term care (LTC) facilities.

## Study Design

Researchers at the Center for Rural Health developed an electronic survey to be disseminated among the administrators and directors of nursing at all LTC facilities in North Dakota. The tool was reviewed by the state Oral Health Program and the state LTC Association, and was approved by the universities Institutional Review Board.

The invitation to participate, along with the survey link, were disseminated by the president of the LTC Association to all basic and nursing care member facilities. All basic, nursing, and assisted living centers in North Dakota are members of the state association. The survey was not disseminated to the assisted living facilities. The survey had 42% response rate; 32% response rate after cutting incomplete surveys.

**Table 1. Survey Participants' Facility Type by Rural-Urban Status**

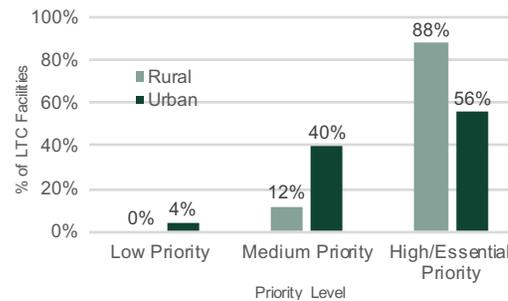
	Skilled Nursing		Basic Care		Skilled & Basic Combined		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Urban	10	24%	4	10%	3	7%	17	40%
Rural	10	24%	7	17%	8	19%	25	60%
All	20	48%	11	26%	11	26%	42	100%

## Principal Findings

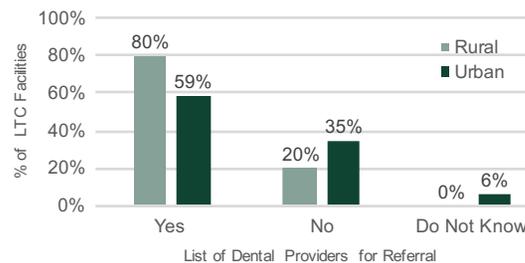
Rural LTC facilities had a stronger culture of oral health than urban facilities; however, neither rural nor urban facilities had a strong culture of oral health care priority.

- Resident daily oral health care was a greater priority for rural than urban LTC facilities.
- Rural LTC facilities (80%) were more likely than urban (59%) to have a list of dental providers for resident referral.
- Rural LTC residents had a shorter wait to see the dentist for non-emergent dental problems than urban.

### Priority of Residents' Daily Oral Health Care



### Percent of Facilities with List of Dental Providers for Referral



## Conclusions

Oral health was an identified priority among participating LTC facilities. However, a very low percentage of facilities overall had systems in place to meet the oral health needs of residents. Likewise, those with policies or procedures lacked collaboration or oversight from dental professionals.

- Only 50% had a written plan of care for dental needs in place.
- A dental professional reviewed, or assisted with, the written plan of care among only 3 facilities.
- Only 7% of all participating LTC facilities indicated the initial oral health exam was completed by a dental professional.

## Barriers to Providing Care

The top five barriers to providing oral health services for rural facilities (\* indicates a top five barrier for urban as well):

1. Availability of a suitable treatment space in the LTC facility
2. Residents' cognitive capacity\*
3. Resident's physical capacity/condition\*
4. Residents' financial concerns
5. Willingness of a dentists to accept Medicaid\*

## Implications

It is recommended that LTC facilities create strong relationships with local oral health providers.

- Dental professionals should be involved in the development of facility written plans of care for dental needs.
- LTC facilities should require specific geriatric oral health training for all staff, utilizing the free Smiles for Life Curriculum.
- All residents should receive an oral health exam upon admission into a basic or skilled nursing care facility, completed by a dental hygienist or dentist.

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