

UVM ScholarWorks

Provider-Reported Barriers to Dental Care for Adult Medicaid Patients in Rural Southern Vermont

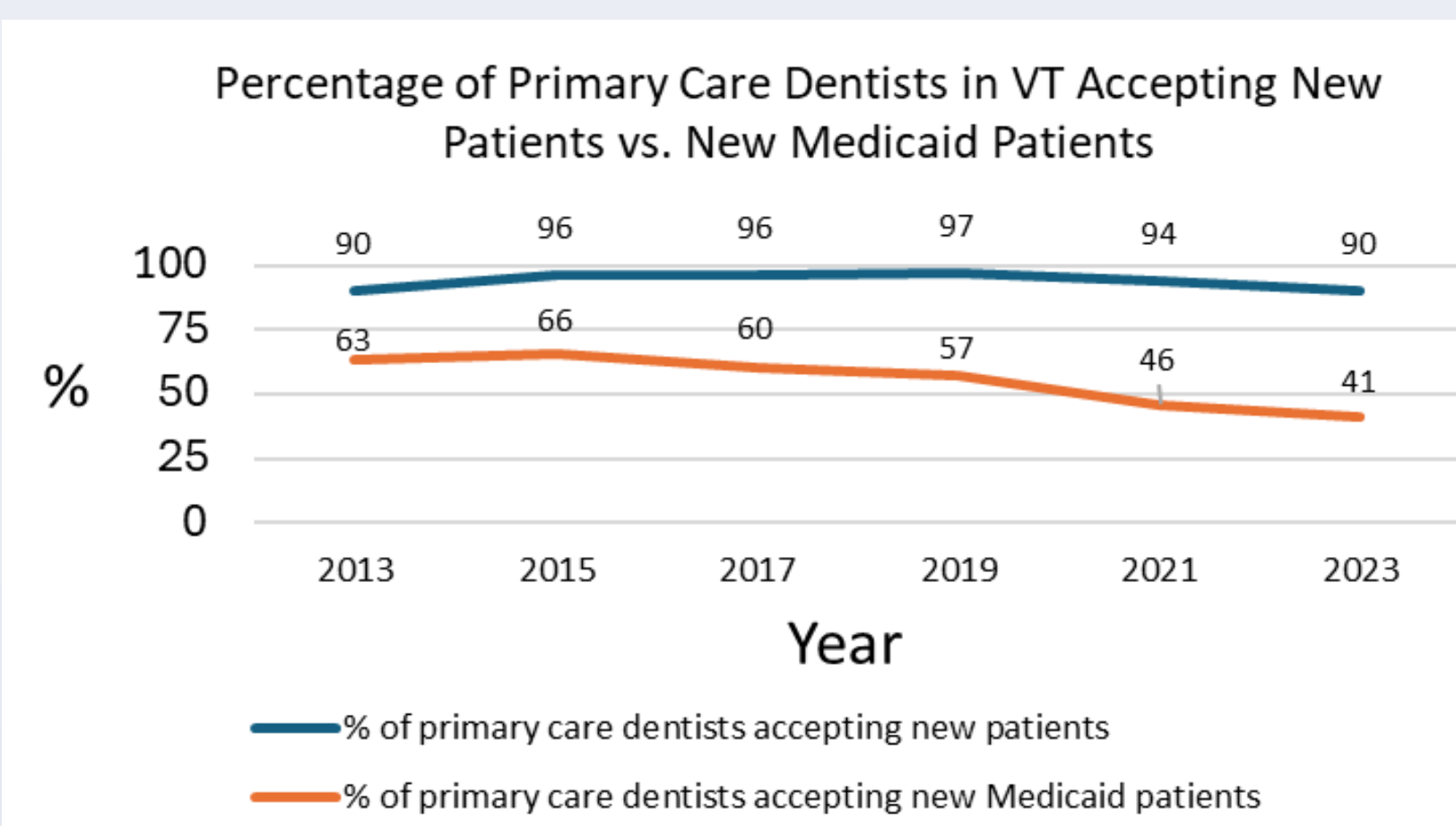
Item Type	Presentation
Authors	Kobsa, Jessica;Baker, Maxwell B.;Jack, Dolak;Jordan, Hacker;Kiersten, Lockwood;Jesus, Mendoza;Arden, Porter
Download date	2026-05-15 08:18:47
Item License	http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14849/9902

Jessica Kobsa¹, Maxwell B. Baker¹, Jack Dolak¹, Jordan Hacker¹, Kiersten Lockwood¹, Jesus Mendoza¹, Arden Porter¹, Samantha Ball², Susan White³, Karen Lounsbury, PhD¹

¹Larner College of Medicine at University of Vermont, Burlington, VT. ²Valley Health Connections, Springfield, VT. ³Southern Vermont Area Health Education Center (AHEC), Springfield, VT

INTRODUCTION

- Dental care **accessibility** is a major public health challenge for adult Medicaid patients in **Vermont** where limited provider participation and significant regional disparities impact dental care accessibility.
- In the Springfield region in 2017, **just 22%** of Medicaid-enrolled adults (age 21-64) received any dental services, **far below** the statewide average of 30% and the *Healthy Vermonters 2020* goal of 85%.¹



2023 Data ⁴	Windham County	Windsor County
Accepting new non-Medicaid patients	95%	88%
Accepting new Medicaid patients	25%	28%

Table 1. Primary care dentists accepting new Medicaid vs. non-Medicaid patients, Windham and Windsor Counties. Source: VT Department of Health. 2023 Census of Dentists Statistical Report

Figure 1. The percentage of primary care dentists in VT accepting new Medicaid patients has decreased dramatically since 2017. Source: VT Department of Health. 2023 Census of Dentists Statistical Report

- In July 2023, Vermont **increased Medicaid reimbursement rates** to 75% of regional commercial rates.²
- Objective:** To assess barriers faced by dental practices in Windham and Windsor Counties in treating adult Medicaid patients and patterns in provider participation, access limitations, and perceptions following the 2023 reimbursement rate increase.

METHODS

- Study design:** mixed-methods descriptive study
- Survey:** 17-question survey (taking ~10 minutes to complete) was sent to 21 general dentistry practices in Windsor and Windham Counties in rural Southern Vermont, excluding exclusive pediatric dentistry practices.
- Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with Dr. John Echternach, DDS (retired dentist and advocate) and Barbara Hodgkins, RDH (Director of Dental Services at North Star Health Chester Dental Center) explored contextual factors influencing Medicaid participation.
- Analysis:** Survey data were analyzed descriptively and using Fisher's exact test.

REFERENCES



RESULTS

- We received **15 survey responses** representing 8 different known practices and 3 respondents who did not provide a practice name.
- Respondents included dentists, dental assistants, office staff, hygienists, and patient care coordinators.
- 11 practices (73.3%) reported they see adult Medicaid patients.
- 3 practices (20%) reported they see new adult Medicaid patients.
- 7 practices (46.7% of respondents) reported knowledge of the increase in Vermont Medicaid dental reimbursement. **No practices reported this change affected the number of Medicaid patients they treat.**
- Provider perceptions of adult Medicaid patients showed substantial variation across practices.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE NUMBER OF MEDICAID PATIENTS SEEN IN DENTAL PRACTICES

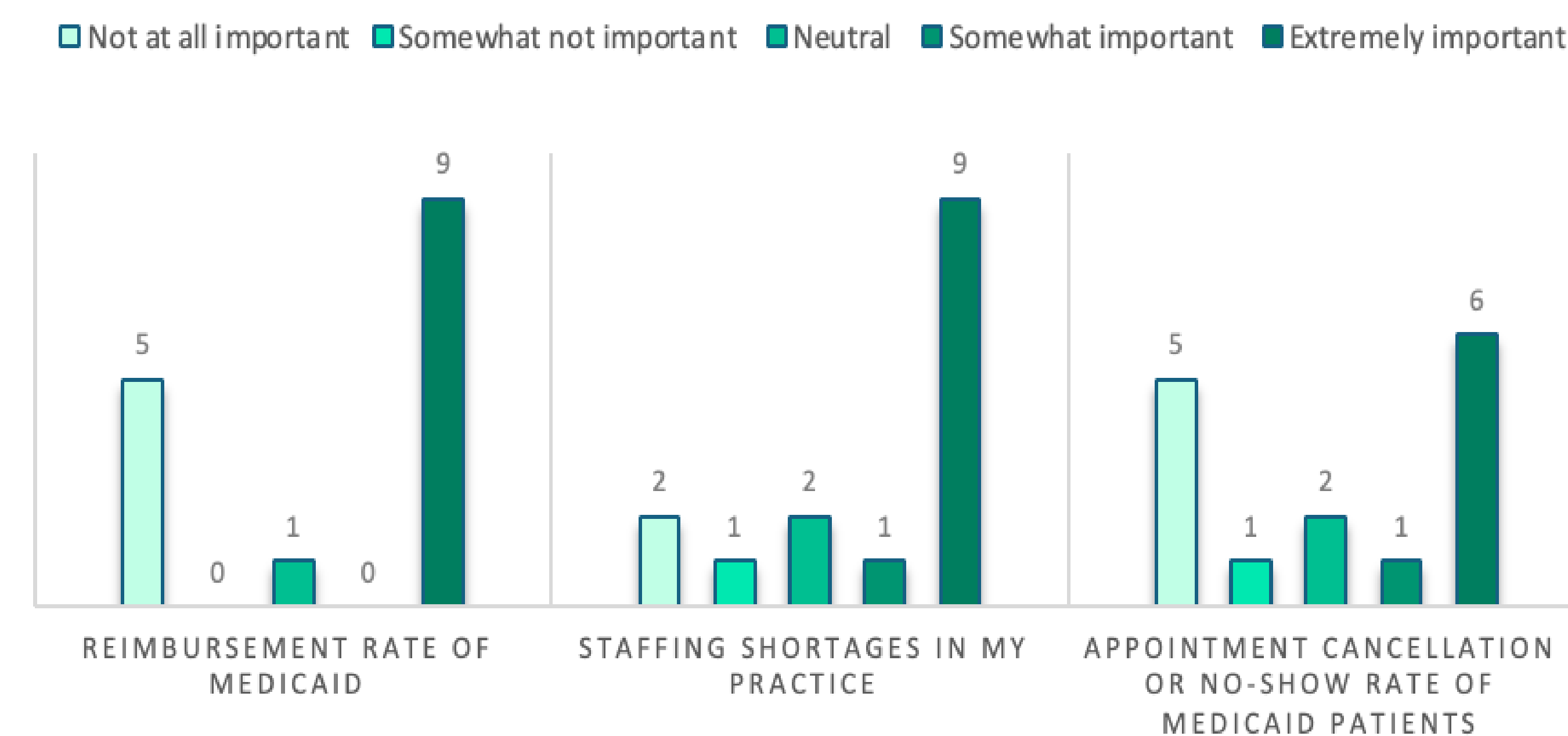


Figure 2. Responses to the question: "Below are listed factors that might influence how many adult Medicaid patients are treated by a dental practice. For each factor, please choose the option that matches how important you think the factor is for your practice. (1=not at all important to 5=extremely important)." N = 15.

"Even the higher Medicaid reimbursement rates have not kept up with the cost of doing business, paying staff a living wage, offering employee benefits, etc."

"Staffing shortages throughout the profession, especially dental hygienists, make providing care to our community extremely challenging at times....it contributes to the very long wait times for community members."

Figure 3. Survey respondents commented that staffing shortages, long wait times, and high costs of doing business limit the number of adult Medicaid patients their practice treats.

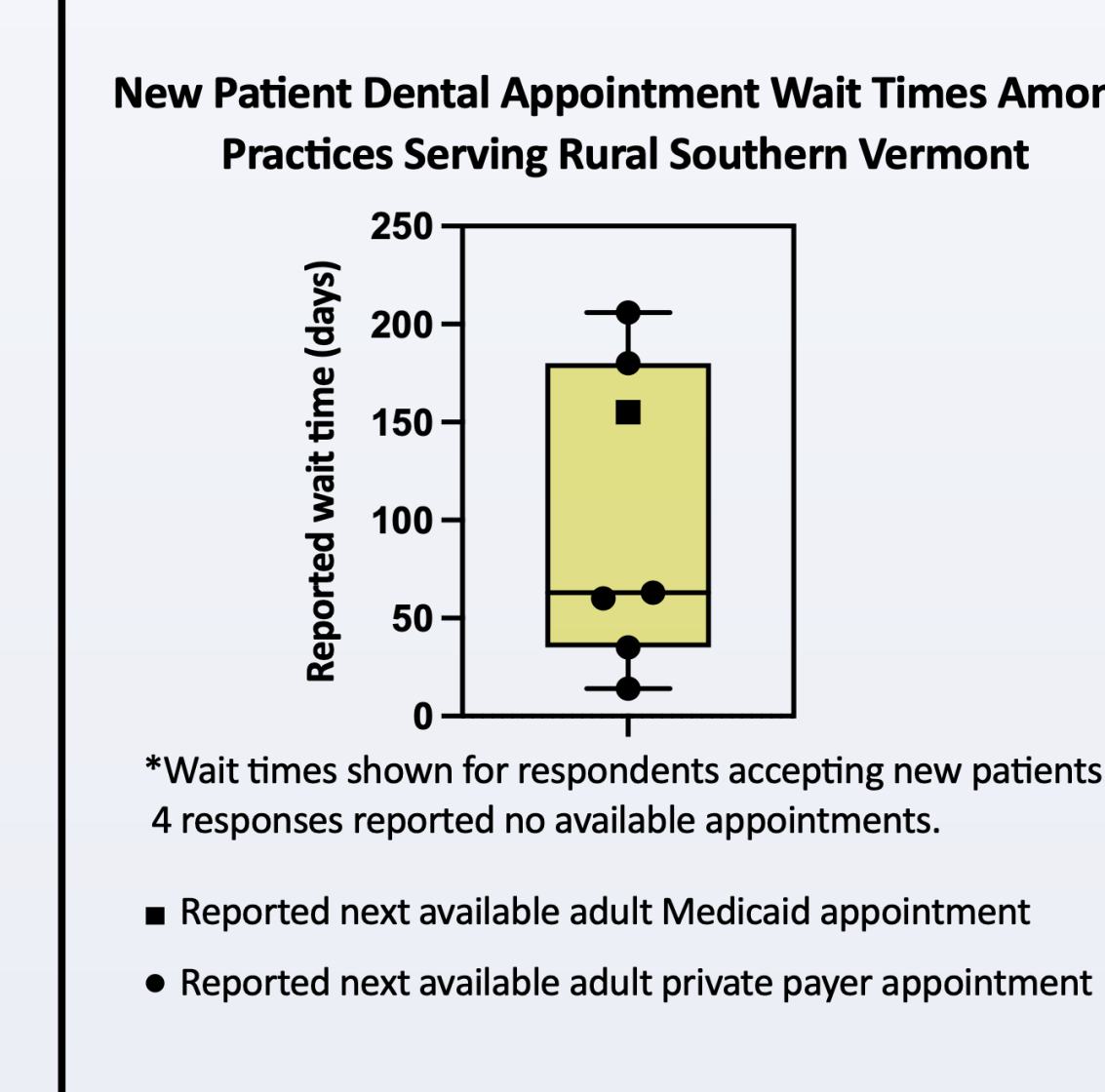


Figure 4. Wait times for new patient appointments ranged widely from 14 to 206 days. 4 respondents reported no availability for new patient appointments regardless of insurance. N = 11.

Perceived Barrier	Practices that take Medicaid (n=11)	Practices that do not take Medicaid (n=4)	P value
Long travel distance	45%	0%	0.23
Transportation difficulties	73%	0%	*0.02
Affordability of care	100%	25%	*0.008
Language	64%	0%	0.07
Reading comprehension	55%	0%	0.10
Health beliefs	27%	25%	>0.99

Table 2. Respondent-reported perceptions of barriers affecting Medicaid patients' access to dental care. *statistical significance set at P = 0.05. Comparisons between groups were performed using Fisher's exact tests.

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

- Dental professionals perceive that adult Medicaid patients face significant barriers to dental care including **transportation difficulties** and **challenges affording** recommended care.
- Awareness of the 2023 Medicaid dental care reimbursement rate increase varied, and most practices **did not** report changes in number of Medicaid patients treated after the policy shift.
- Medicaid's low reimbursement rate** and **staffing shortages** are the most important factors that affect the number of Medicaid patients that dental practices in rural Southern VT treat.
- These findings suggest that Medicaid reimbursement increases alone are unlikely to improve access without parallel efforts to **strengthen the dental workforce, address logistical barriers,** and support broader social determinants of oral health.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Larner College of Medicine, Southern Vermont AHEC, Valley Health Connections, Robin Miller of the VT Dept of Health, and the numerous individuals who helped this project come together, and we look forward to helping provide care for the people of Vermont for years to come.