



## Senior Oral Health Survey

March 2017



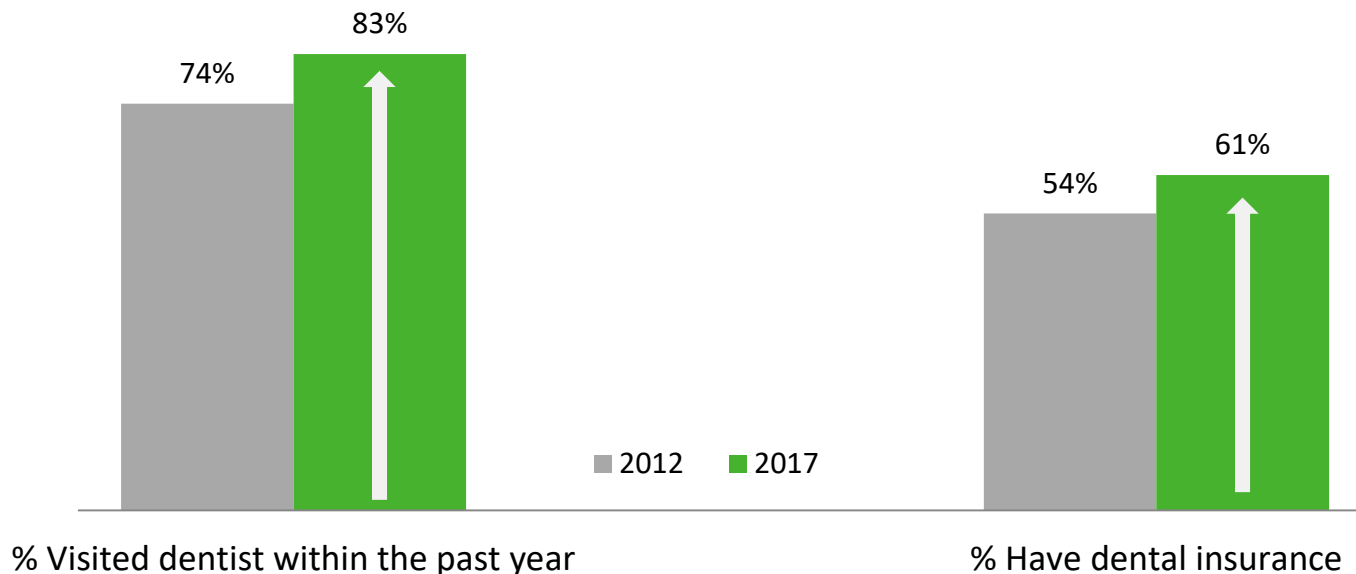
# Executive Summary

## Introduction

- In 2012, the Washington Dental Service Foundation (WDSF) first conducted this oral health survey among Washington state residents who are 55 years of age or older, obtaining baseline data regarding seniors' oral health status and behaviors. This year (2017) marks the second time conducting this survey.
- The primary objectives of this statewide survey are to track changes for senior residents' oral health status from 2012, compare older residents' attitudes and behaviors toward oral health by demographic characteristics (e.g. age, ethnicity, income, etc.) as well as geographic area, and capture baseline data of minorities (Hispanics and African Americans) regarding their oral health status.
- The survey instrument used for this year's assessment was kept largely the same as the tool developed in 2012 in order to gauge changes over time.
- For the 2017 assessment, 2,688 Washingtonians who are age 55 and older were surveyed by phone using Random Digit Dialing (RDD) on landline phone numbers with a wireless augment (30% of the total completed surveys). Quotas were placed by geographic region, age and gender to follow U.S. Census data for the state of Washington. In addition, certain demographic groups were intentionally over-represented in order to ensure that we had sufficient data for analysis on African Americans and Hispanics (150 interviews each).

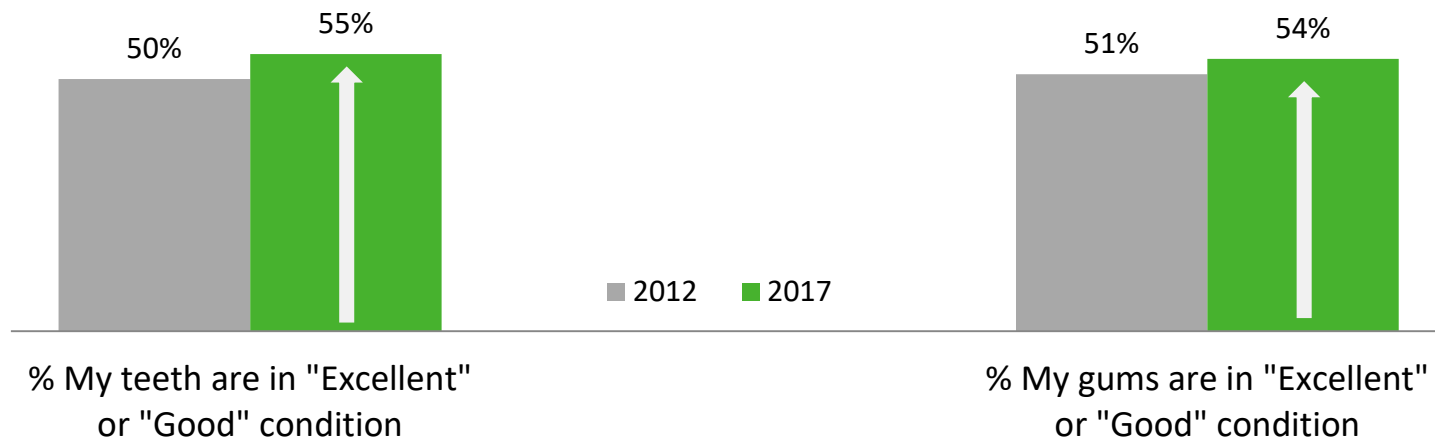
### Nearly all Washington seniors (97%) consider their oral health to be important.

- The percentage of seniors who have seen a dentist within the last year increased significantly, from 74% in 2012 to 83% today.
- The percentage of seniors who have dental insurance coverage also increased significantly, from 54% in 2012 to 61% of today.
  - Of the 17% who did not see a dentist in the last year, the cost of that care is presenting *less* of a barrier, being an issue for just 27% of those who did not have a dental visit (5% of all Washington seniors), compared to 46% in 2012 (12% of all seniors).



### Washington seniors' oral health has improved.

- Fewer of today's seniors say they have experienced any tooth loss, with 44% reporting having all of their teeth still intact this year, compared to 37% in 2012.
- Fewer say they are in need of dental care within the next month, down from 19% in 2012 to 17% today.
  - The type of dental care needed is less likely to be major/restorative, with 79% needing this kind of care this year versus 84% in 2012.
- Today's seniors are feeling better in general about the condition of their teeth and gums, with 55% describing the condition of their teeth as either "Excellent" or "Good" this year, compared to 50% in 2012, and 54% describing the condition of their gums as "Excellent" or "Good" this year, compared to 51% in 2012.



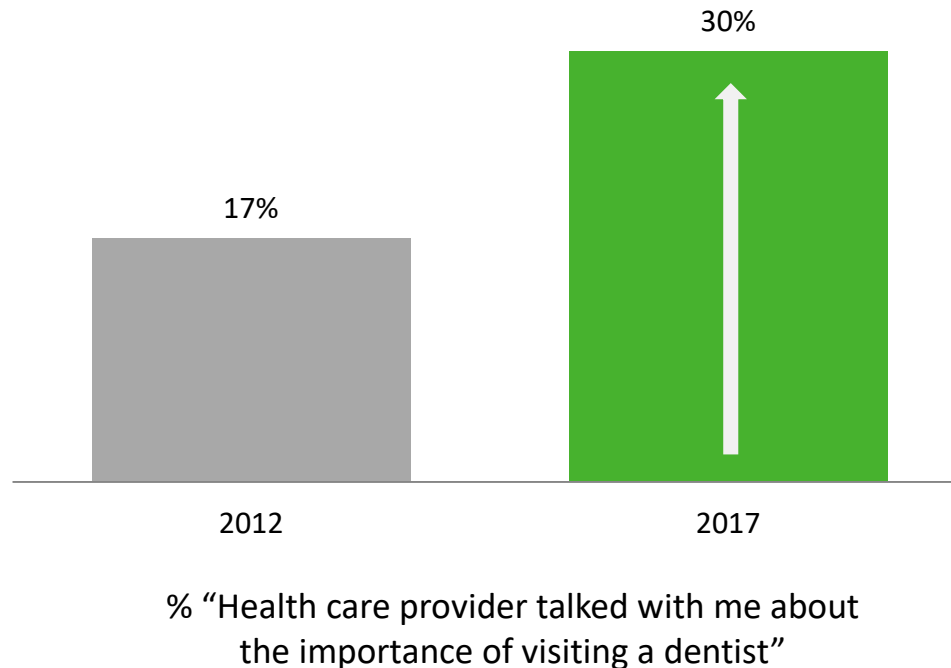
### Fewer seniors suffer from oral sensitivities and pain.

- The percentage saying they avoid particular foods “very often” because of problems in their mouth decreased significantly, from 7% in 2012 to 5% today.
- Thirteen percent of seniors (13%) say they have had painful aching somewhere in their mouth during the last year at least “occasionally,” significantly lower than 2012 (16%).



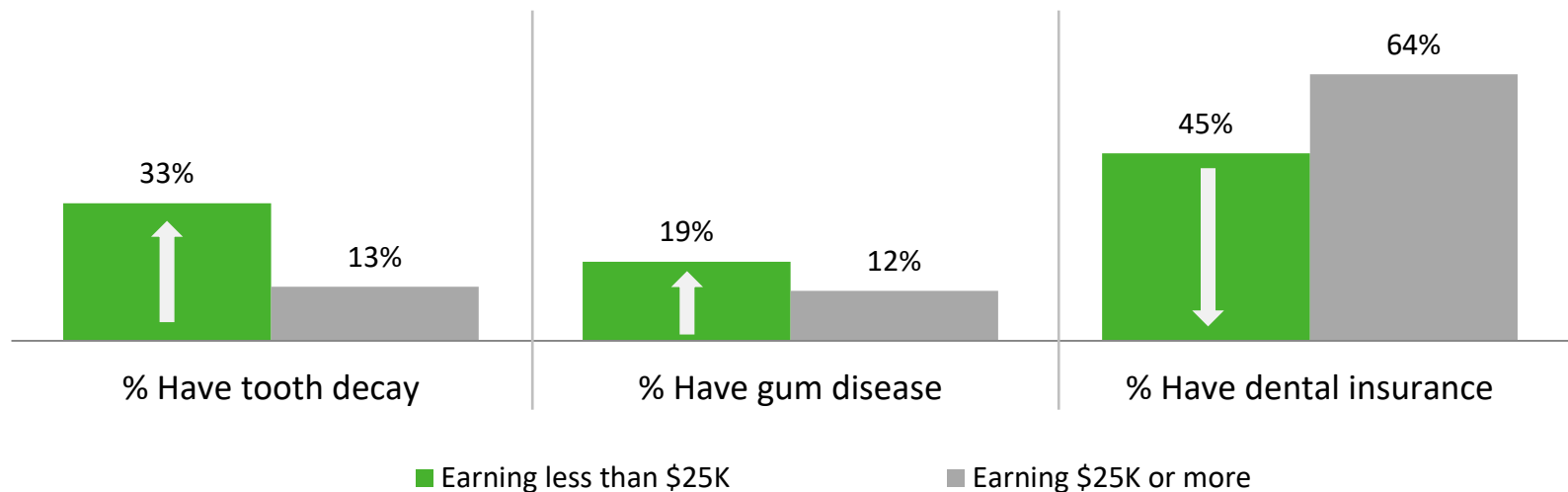
### More seniors are having communications with their health care providers about oral health.

- The percentage of Washington seniors who said their doctor, nurse or other health care worker talked with them about the importance of seeing a dentist nearly doubled, from 17% in 2012 to 30% today.



### Significant disparities in seniors' oral health exist when comparing those with higher incomes to those who are living on lesser means.

- Most impacted are Washington seniors who have incomes of \$25K per year or less, where their likelihood of being in need of dental care is much greater, exacerbated by the fact that they are more likely to have been diagnosed with diabetes.
- These disadvantaged seniors are significantly less likely to describe their condition of their teeth and gums as healthy, and they are the most likely to suffer from tooth loss, gum disease, tooth decay, dry mouth, and mouth sensitivity.
- Their poor oral health is likely amplified by their lack of financial security, with less than half (45%) having any kind of dental insurance coverage, and many of them citing cost as the main barrier to getting needed dental care.



### African American and Hispanic seniors report poorer oral health than their white/Caucasian counterparts.

- Hispanic seniors are the least likely to make yearly dental visits (67%), seeking dental care most often only when something is wrong.
- African American seniors are statistically on par with Hispanics when it comes to making routine dental visits (71%) but African Americans are the most likely to have lost six or more teeth (33% compared to 24% among Hispanics, both of which are significantly higher than the 16% measured among white/Caucasian seniors).
- One in three African American (33%) and four out of ten Hispanic seniors (44%) have been diagnosed with diabetes, which is associated with gum disease.
- These two minority groups are also the most likely to have a dental problem that needs to be addressed within the next month, with many saying they currently have tooth decay.

