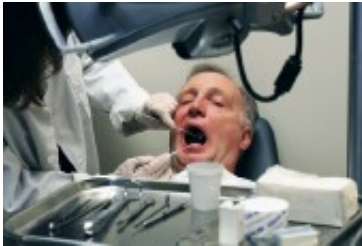


Dental insurance doesn't guarantee people will care for their teeth

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Study calls for education about the importance of oral health care.

(HealthDay)—Having dental insurance doesn't mean people will actually take care of their teeth, a new study indicates.

The findings suggest patient outreach and education are needed to ensure that people understand the importance of good dental [health](#) and that they use their [insurance coverage](#) to get care, the University of Maryland School of Dentistry researchers said.

The researchers examined data from a 2008 survey of older Americans who either did or did not have [dental insurance](#). They also looked at individual characteristics such as race, gender, [marital status](#), age and health.

Their conclusion: Providing dental coverage to those without insurance who generally don't seek dental care does not necessarily improve the

likelihood that they will see a dentist.

Getting these people to seek [dental care](#) requires going beyond simply providing insurance. Patient outreach and education are essential, according to the study, which was published online in the February issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

"You can't just hand people coverage and say, 'There, that's better,'" study first author Richard Manski, professor and chief of dental public health, said in a university news release. "You need to offer some inducements, some promotional campaign, to change people's attitudes and beliefs. We hope this starts the process of a new way of thinking about the problem."

But getting people to use dental insurance is not a short-term process, Manski said.

"We need to set long-term goals for such things and understand that dental coverage and use is a long-term issue, so we don't get frustrated that rates of use aren't going up right away," Manski said.

The study findings also apply to other types of [health insurance](#), he said.

"Dentistry and dental coverage is a perfect experimental model for health care," Manski said. "There are lessons to be learned for overall health coverage and use as well."

More information: The American Academy of Family Physicians outlines the importance of caring for your [teeth and mouth](#).

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