



Fact Sheet

Oral Health in America Advances and Challenges

A Report from the National Institutes of Health

Section 5: Pain, Mental Illness, Substance Use, and Oral Health

Key Summary

- Substance misuse and mental illness can have negative effects on oral health and well-being.
- Oral health professionals have responded to the opioid epidemic with improved prescription and treatment practices for orofacial pain, including pain associated with oral surgery.
- Most opioid prescriptions for dental conditions are provided in emergency departments—an expensive and often ineffective practice.
- Tobacco use is a major risk factor for gum disease and cancers of the oral cavity and pharynx. By more actively engaging with their patients in tobacco cessation practices and programs, oral health professionals could substantially reduce the risk of these diseases.
- Marijuana use is associated with reduced salivary flow, and some associations have been found with higher levels of decay and gum disease. Because these effects often are compounded by tobacco use, research is needed to refine the specific effects of marijuana on oral health.
- Methamphetamine misuse has devastating oral health consequences that severely affect salivary flow, resulting in specific patterns of extensive tooth decay, broken teeth, and diseased gums, as well as serious consequences for overall health.
- Early research on e-cigarette use shows that it has many of the same negative effects on gums and soft tissue seen with tobacco use, including increased risks for oral malignancies.
- Because of the impact of many mental illnesses—from depression and anxiety to schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses—many who suffer from these conditions are deprived of the cognitive and emotional energy needed for personal care behaviors that sustain good oral health.

Call to Action

- In order to participate fully in an integrated system of health care, oral health professionals must acquire new competencies related to the behavioral health aspects of substance use and mental illness to provide optimal oral health care for, and appropriately refer, those with substance use disorders and mental health problems.



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