What are the dental needs of people over 60? A survey of older adults in four counties in Arizona revealed some people in pain and many with dental needs, but few with regular dental visits.

Recently, the Arizona Department of Health Services, Office of Oral Health conducted a two-part survey on dental health. In the first part, a dental questionnaire was completed by people receiving home-delivered meals or eating at any of 24 congregate meal sites in Cochise, Pima, Santa Cruz, or Yuma Counties (see map). Of 873 respondents:

- Over half (58%) said that they needed dental work now. While relief of pain, fillings, crowns, extractions, and gum treatment were mentioned, dentures/denture work were the most frequently mentioned need (28%).
- Almost 12% said they had a toothache in the last four weeks. Dental problems can make it painful and difficult to eat.
- Almost one third (32%) said that they avoided eating some foods because of problems with their teeth or dentures. Most were those receiving home-delivered meals. Needing to avoid some foods can make it difficult to maintain good nutrition.

In the second part of the survey, 147 people at the 12 meal sites in Pima County received dental screenings. Results showed that:

- Almost half (49%) of the respondents had untreated cavities.
- Sadly, 11 respondents were in oral pain on the day of the dental screening...a day they had come to the center to have a meal.

Many older adults in Arizona are in need of dental care to relieve pain and maintain adequate nutrition.

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More older people without teeth than in the state or the nation...

Just over one third (31%) reported having lost all of their teeth, compared to 15% in the state as a whole, and 21% (65+ year-olds) in the nation1.

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2http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/
It’s important to visit the dentist every year—diabetes, stroke, and cardiovascular disease are related to poor oral health. It’s also costs less to fix small dental problems before they become big ones. Visiting a dentist is important even without teeth—the dentist can check the soft tissues, and the fit of partials and dentures.

Even with the dental problems mentioned (see reverse), only about one third (33%) of the people who filled out the questionnaire visited a dentist in the last year, compared to 69% in Arizona\textsuperscript{1} and 71% (65+ year-olds) in the U.S.\textsuperscript{1}

Almost one fourth (22%) had not been to a dentist in five years, compared to only 12% in Arizona\textsuperscript{1}.

People receiving home-delivered meals were less likely to have a dentist than those eating at the centers (43% vs. 52%).

Less than 19% of the respondents said they had dental insurance (compared with 46% in Arizona\textsuperscript{2}). It is not surprising, then, that cost was a main reason for not going to a dentist in the last year, even over transportation (see graph).

Other Approaches to Getting Dental Care...

About 29% said they had dental work done outside the U.S. Almost one fourth (73%) had the work done in Mexico. Over half (57%) had the work done within the last two years. The main reason for having work done in another country? Cost (66%).

Older adults receiving home-delivered meals and eating at meal sites in Arizona need access to dental services that they can afford.

Dental visits are important before something hurts, and even with few or no teeth. Of those who answered the questionnaire:

- 36% were male and 64% were female.
- Respondents were 60-99 years of age (average age 77 years).
- Over half (53%) were White and about one third (34%) were Hispanic, with the remaining 13% divided among Blacks, Native Americans, Asians, Pacific Islanders/Native Hawaiians, two or more races, and other races/ethnicities.
- 29% were high school graduates, compared to 35% of 65+ year-olds in the US as a whole.
- 41% ate meals at the center and 59% received home-delivered meals.

\textsuperscript{1}State-based Examples of Network Innovation, Opportunity, and Replication.