

# DENTAL CONSULTATIONS by Wayne J. Millar

According to the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 63% of people aged 15 or older had consulted a dentist in the previous year (Table A), up from the 47% estimated in the 1978/79 Canada Health Survey. Factors such as the introduction of fluoride toothpaste and fluoridated water in many communities may have contributed to a reduction in dental caries and the retention of permanent teeth. In addition, the growing availability of employment-related dental benefits probably promoted more widespread use of dental services (see *Dental insurance and use of dental services*).

A higher percentage of women than men had seen a dentist in 2003: 66% versus 61%. The likelihood of dental consultation declined steadily with age, from more than 60% at ages 25 to 54 to 46% of seniors. Up to age 45, consultation rates for women exceeded those for men (data not shown).

## Across the country

An estimated 7 in 10 (70%) Ontario residents had consulted a dentist in 2003. At 67%, use of dental services in British Columbia also exceeded the national average. By contrast, use was just 46% in Newfoundland and Labrador, and was also below the national level in Québec, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and the three Territories. Provincial/territorial differences in funding of dental care,

access to dental insurance through employment, location of services, and oral health could all influence consultation rates.<sup>1</sup>

Residents of rural areas were less likely than those in urban areas to have consulted a dentist in the past year.

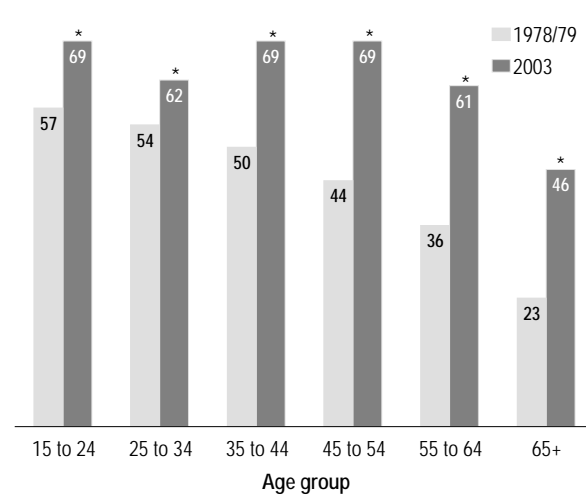
## Education, income

Education and household income were both associated with dental consultations. While 47% of people with less than high school graduation reported a visit, the figure for college/university graduates was 70%. Similarly, 44% of residents of the lowest income households had consulted a dentist in the past year, compared with 77% of those in the highest income households. In most cases, regardless of education and household income, rates of dental consultation were higher among women than men.

From 1978/79 to 2003, there was an increase in the proportion of people in each age group who had consulted a dentist. For people at each education level, the consultation rate also rose. Large increases in

consultation rates in the upper-middle and high household income groups meant that the gap in consultation rates between residents of high- and low-income households widened from 23 percentage points in 1978/79 to 34 in 2003 (data not shown).

Percentage of people who consulted dentist in past year, 1978/79 and 2003

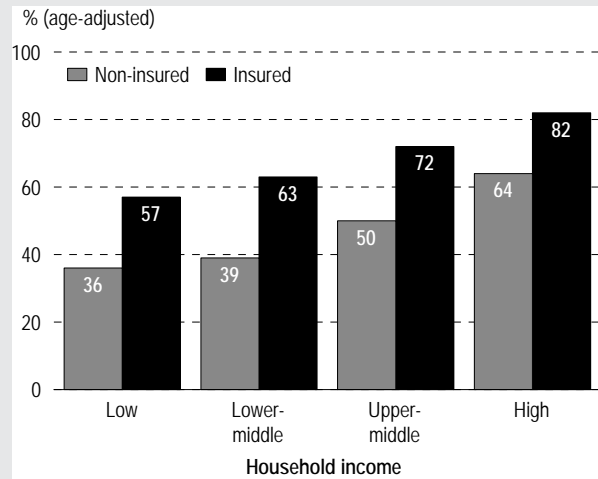


Data sources: 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey; 1978/97 Canada Health Survey  
 \* Significantly higher than estimate for 1978/79 (p < 0.05)

## Dental insurance and use of dental services

Dental insurance was an important factor influencing dental visits. In 2003, about three-quarters (74%) of people who had benefits to help cover all or part of their dental expenses had consulted a dentist in the past year, compared with 48% of the non-insured. Nonetheless, even if they were insured, people in lower-income households were less likely than those in the higher-income group to have seen a dentist.

Percentage of people who consulted dentist in past year, by dental insurance status and household income



Data source: 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey

Note: The income gradients among the insured and non-insured are both significant; the differences within each income group by insurance status are also significant.

## Percentage of people who consulted dentist in past year, by education and household income

	Total	Men	Women
	%		
<b>Education</b>			
Less than high school graduation	47	47	46
High school graduation	64	61	66*
Some postsecondary	64	60	68*
College/University graduation	70	67	73*
<b>Household income</b>			
Low	44	43	45
Lower-middle	49	45	53*
Upper-middle	64	59	69*
High	77	74	80*

Data source: 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey

\* Significantly higher than estimate for men ( $p < 0.05$ )

## Reasons for not seeking care

Among people who had not visited a dentist in the past three years, 31% said they did not think it was necessary, and 27% reported wearing dentures (Table B). One in ten respondents had simply “not gotten around to it”; 5% mentioned “pain or embarrassment,” and 18% cited cost.

Once again, differences by household income and insurance status were apparent. About one in five (22%) of the low income group mentioned cost, compared with just 9% of the high income group. Similarly, while 26% of the non-insured population cited cost, just 7% of the insured group gave cost as a reason for not seeing a dentist in the past three years.

## Data sources

The information in this report is from the **2003 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS)** and the **1978/79 Canada Health Survey (CHS)**.

The CCHS is a general health survey that covers the household population aged 12 or older.<sup>2</sup> It does not include residents of Indian reserves, Canadian Forces bases, and some remote areas. Data for cycle 2.1 were collected between January and December 2003. The overall response rate was 80.6%; the total sample size was 135,573.

The CHS took place from May 1978 through March 1979. The survey covered the non-institutionalized population, excluding residents of the territories, Indian reserves and remote areas. The sample size was 12,218 households.<sup>3</sup>

The sample sizes for the population aged 15 or older analyzed in this article were 35,927 for the CCHS and 23,791 for the CHS, representing populations of 25.3 million and 17.5 million, respectively.

To account for the multi-stage sample design of the CCHS, the bootstrap technique was used to calculate confidence intervals and coefficients of variation and also to test the statistical significance of differences. A significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was applied in all cases.<sup>4-7</sup> Bootstrap weights were not available for the CHS; the standard errors of prevalence rates were estimated with SUDAAN.<sup>8</sup>

## The Questions

To measure *dental consultations*, respondents to the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) were asked: "In the past 12 months, how many times have you seen, or talked on the telephone, about your physical, emotional or mental health with a dentist or orthodontist?" The 1978/79 Canada Health Survey (CHS) asked: "During the past 12 months, how many times did you see or talk to a dentist?"

*Household income* was based on quintiles; for this analysis, four categories were established: low (quintiles 1 and 2), lower-middle (3), upper-middle (4) and high (5). The data are not strictly comparable because the CHS variable was based on economic families; the CCHS variable, on households. An economic family is a group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and who are related by blood, marriage, adoption or common-law. A household is a person or group of people who occupy the same dwelling and do not have a usual place of residence elsewhere in Canada.<sup>9</sup>

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## References

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Table A

## Dental consultations in past year, household population aged 15 or older, 2003

	Sample	Popu- lation '000	Dental consul- tation
			%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35,927</b>	<b>25,307</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Men	16,290	12,426	61*
Women	19,637	12,881	66*
<b>Age group</b>			
15-24	5,124	4,201	69*
25-34	5,581	4,152	62
35-44	5,953	5,310	69*
45-54	6,097	4,623	69*
55-64	5,367	3,237	61*
65+	7,805	3,785	46*
<b>Province/Territory</b>			
Newfoundland and Labrador	1,767	441	46*
Prince Edward Island	1,278	113	64
Nova Scotia	2,495	757	61
New Brunswick	1,657	610	51*
Québec	6,116	6,070	56*
Ontario	7,397	9,792	70*
Manitoba	2,731	873	61
Saskatchewan	1,665	755	53*
Alberta	4,119	2,468	62
British Columbia	4,342	3,361	67*
Yukon Territory	734	24	49*
Northwest Territories	978	31	68*
Nunavut	648	13	56*
<b>Education</b>			
Less than high school graduation	10,275	5,757	47*
High school graduation	6,200	4,622	64
Some postsecondary	2,646	2,041	65
College/University graduation	16,220	12,344	71*
Missing	586	544	57
<b>Household income</b>			
Low	3,957	1,945	44*
Lower-middle	6,869	4,199	48*
Upper-middle	10,520	7,449	64
High	8,852	7,681	78*
Missing	5,729	4,034	61
<b>Rural/Urban</b>			
Rural	9,521	4,829	56*
Urban	26,406	20,478	65*

Data source: 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey

Note: Because of rounding, detail may not add to totals.

\* Significantly different from value for total ( $p < 0.05$ )

Table B

## Selected reasons† for not visiting dentist in past three years, by household income and dental insurance status, household population aged 15 or older, Canada, 2003

	Number '000	Reason for not visiting dentist <sup>†</sup>				
		Unnec- essary	Wears dentures	Cost	Not Pain or gotten embar- around rass- to it ment	
					10	5
<b>Household income</b>						
Low	4,714	31	27	18	10	5
Lower-middle	619	28	33	22	9 <sup>E2</sup>	3 <sup>E1</sup>
Upper-middle	1,260	31	27	23	7	4 <sup>E2</sup>
High	1,303	34	28	16	11	5
Missing	678	29	21	9 <sup>E1</sup>	15 <sup>E1</sup>	8 <sup>E1</sup>
Missing	853	30	26	18	9 <sup>E2</sup>	F
<b>Dental insurance</b>						
Yes	1,559	30	28	7	12	7
No	3,030	32	26	26	9	3 <sup>E1</sup>
Missing	125	25 <sup>E1</sup>	24	F	F	F

Data source: 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

† Respondents may have given more than one reason.

E1 Coefficient of variation between 16.6% and 25.0%

E2 Coefficient of variation between 25.1% and 33.3%

F Coefficient of variation greater than 33.3%