

INSIDE I-SMILE

2025 UPDATE ON CHILDREN'S ORAL HEALTH

I-Smile connects Iowa children and families with dental, medical, and community resources to ensure a lifetime of health and wellness. The program works to prevent dental disease and improve access to care by building community partnerships, providing targeted outreach to dental and medical providers, and creating opportunities to identify dental needs early. I-Smile provides care coordination to address barriers families experience when seeking dental care and offers gap-filling preventive services at locations like schools and WIC clinics. Good oral health allows children to eat well, concentrate on learning, and grow and thrive.

QUICK CLIPS FOR HEALTHY SMILES

The Iowa HHS I-Smile team created three animated videos on brushing, flossing and healthy eating to prevent tooth decay. Each short video uses animation and sound effects to share oral health tips in a fun, easy-to-understand way without words. The videos are part of the **Healthy Habit All-Star** series and are used by local I-Smile programs to promote oral health across the state.

Scan the QR code
or [click here](#) to
watch the videos!



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT



Cavity Free Iowa is an initiative that promotes applying preventive fluoride varnish to young children's teeth during medical well-child visits. I-Smile Coordinators train medical providers, such as physicians and nurses, to perform dental screenings, apply fluoride varnish, and refer children to I-Smile for care coordination of dental care.

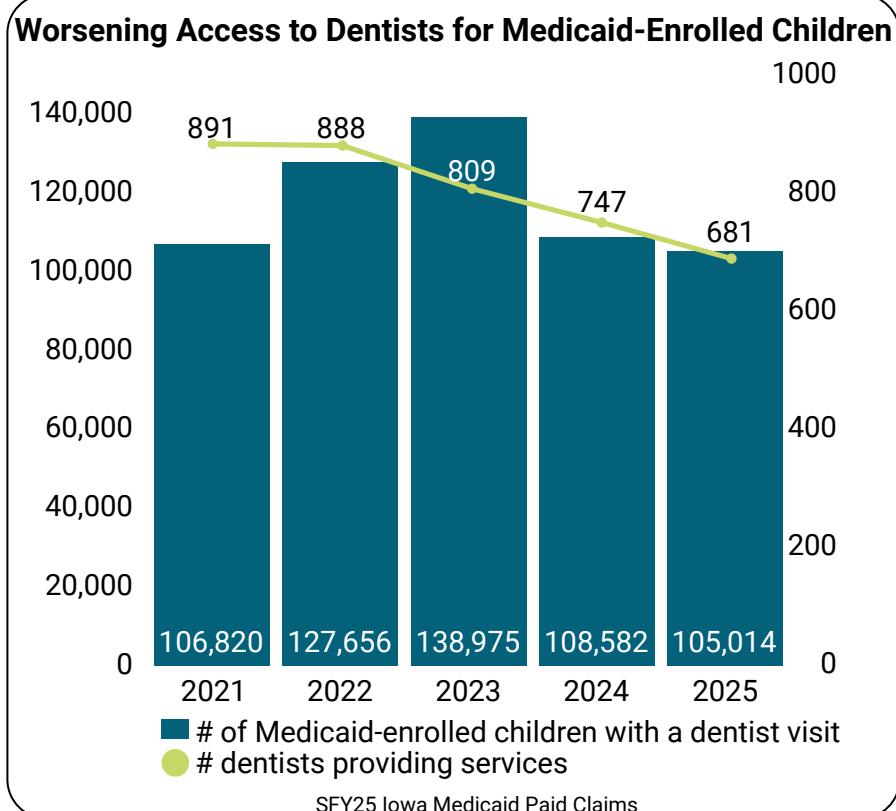
To improve participation of medical offices, a **Cavity Free Iowa** toolkit was updated in 2025, with enhanced protocols, billing and coding guidance and new educational and training materials.

Scan the QR code or
[click here](#) to learn
more about **Cavity
Free Iowa**.



ONGOING CHALLENGES FOR SOME FAMILIES SEEKING DENTAL CARE

Receiving care from dentists continues to be a challenge for Medicaid-enrolled children. In 2025, more than 3,500 fewer Medicaid-enrolled children ages 0–12 saw a dentist compared to the previous year. During the same time, the number of dentists providing dental services for these children also dropped from 747 to 681. Many dentists cite low reimbursement rates as a major barrier to seeing Medicaid-enrolled children. In June 2025, Iowa Medicaid announced increases for dental reimbursement rates, which may encourage more dentists to provide services to Medicaid-enrolled children in 2026.



I-SMILE IMPACT FOR AGES 0-12 IN 2025

68,358

children received care coordination for dental care from I-Smile

43,160

children received preventive dental services, like dental screenings and fluoride varnish, from I-Smile dental hygienists and nurses, in locations such as WIC clinics and childcare centers

20,990

children and their parents received hands-on instruction about daily home care - 1,392 more than in 2024

Because of children's limited access to dentists, I-Smile continues to fill gaps by offering dental services in locations where underserved families may be found. In 2025, 580 more Medicaid-enrolled children ages 0–12 received services through I-Smile compared to 2024, with the largest increase among children ages 0–2 years. This growth highlights I-Smile's ongoing role to prevent dental disease and help families access essential care when and where they need it.

In the past year, workforce challenges were a hurdle for I-Smile. Some local programs had difficulty filling dental hygienist and nurse vacancies. Although preventive services were provided to as many children as possible, staffing issues resulted in fewer children receiving those services in some areas. I-Smile is committed to identifying solutions to maintain quality of care and options for reaching families when staff is limited.

SFY25 Iowa Medicaid Paid Claims



Health and
Human Services

Division of Public Health
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