

Integrating Oral Health into Diabetes Management

Iowa adults with diabetes are extremely engaged with the medical system, but far fewer receive dental care. According to 2024 Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data, 95% had a routine medical checkup in the past year, while only 66% had a dental visit (Table 1).

Table 1. Medical Care, Dental Care, and Tooth Loss by Diabetes Status (Iowa BRFSS, 2024)

Diabetes Status	Routine Medical Checkup in Past Year	Dental Visit in Past Year	Tooth Loss		
			Any* (18+ years old)	6 or more (45+ years old)	Total (65+ years old)
Yes	95%	66%	54%	30%	14%
No	76%	70%	35%	17%	9%

*Age-adjusted rate

Diabetes increases the risk of oral health problems, including tooth loss, which is closely linked to periodontal disease and chronic inflammation. BRFSS data show that Iowa adults with diabetes experience tooth loss more often than those without it (Table 1). These oral health issues can make blood glucose harder to manage, and poorly controlled diabetes further worsens oral health (Figure 1). Because of this two-way relationship, **regular dental care is a critical part of diabetes management** and is essential for preventing complications and protecting long-term health.

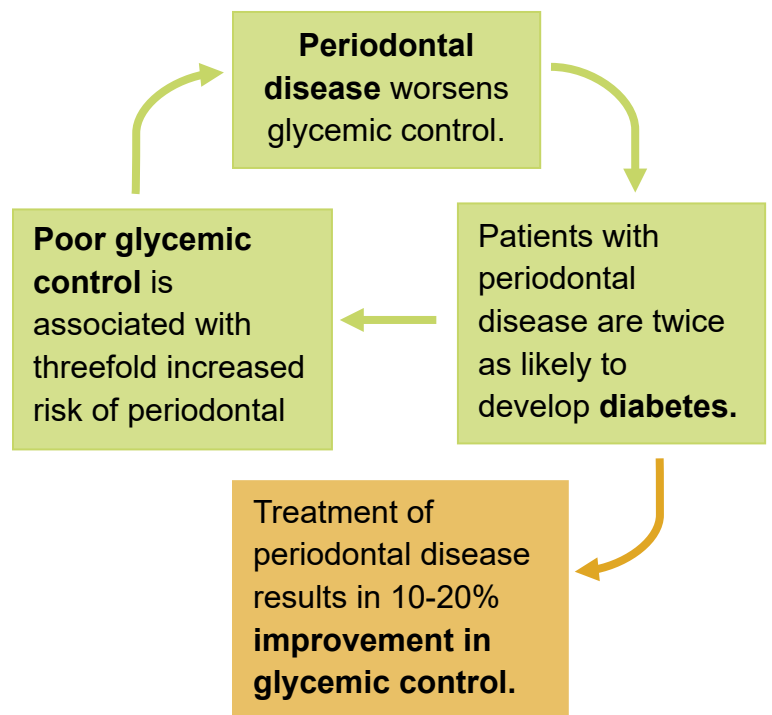


Figure 1. Diabetes-Periodontal Link (Source: [Smiles For Life](#))

Among Iowa adults with diabetes, medical care is nearly universal across income levels. However, **adults with lower incomes are less likely to have seen a dentist in the past year and more likely to experience tooth loss** (Table 2). These gaps highlight an important oral health inequity that places lower-income adults with diabetes at greater risk for preventable tooth loss.

Table 2. Indicators Among Adults with Diabetes, by Federal Poverty Level (Iowa BRFSS, 2024)

Federal Poverty Level	Routine Medical Checkup in Past Year	Dental Visit in Past Year	Tooth Loss		
			Any* (18+ years old)	6 or more (45+ years old)	Total (65+ years old)
<185%	96%	53%	70%	46%	27%**
≥185%	94%	69%	53%	29%	10%

*Age-adjusted rate

**Interpret with caution (95% Confidence Interval >20%)

Key Takeaways



- Diabetes raises the risk for gum disease which can worsen glucose control. Regular dental care helps prevent complications and supports better diabetes management.
- In Iowa, low-income adults with diabetes are less likely to receive dental care and more likely to experience tooth loss.
- Strengthening integration between medical and dental care systems is essential to improving access and addressing oral-health disparities.

Recommendations



- Ask patients brief oral health screening questions (gum bleeding, loose teeth, dry mouth, time since last dental visit).
- Explain how poor glucose control increases inflammation and risk for gum disease.
- Reinforce the importance of regular dental care for diabetes management.
- Establish a standard referral process to dental providers for adults with diabetes.
- Help connect patients to affordable dental clinics and programs that address financial and access barriers.

Resources



Dental Care Resources for Patients:

- Community Health Centers offering dental services
- [University of Iowa dental clinics](#)
- Low-cost dental hygiene school clinics
- [I-Smile Silver program](#) – care coordination for adults
- [Donated Dental Services](#) – volunteer-based care for qualifying patients



Provider Education and Support:

- Smiles for Life oral health training modules: <https://www.smilesforlifeoralhealth.org>
- Oral health-related [quality improvement activity](#) with merit-based incentive for Medicare-participating providers