



EARLY MILESTONES
COLORADO

HOT TOPIC BRIEF



SCREENING FOR
SUCCESS:

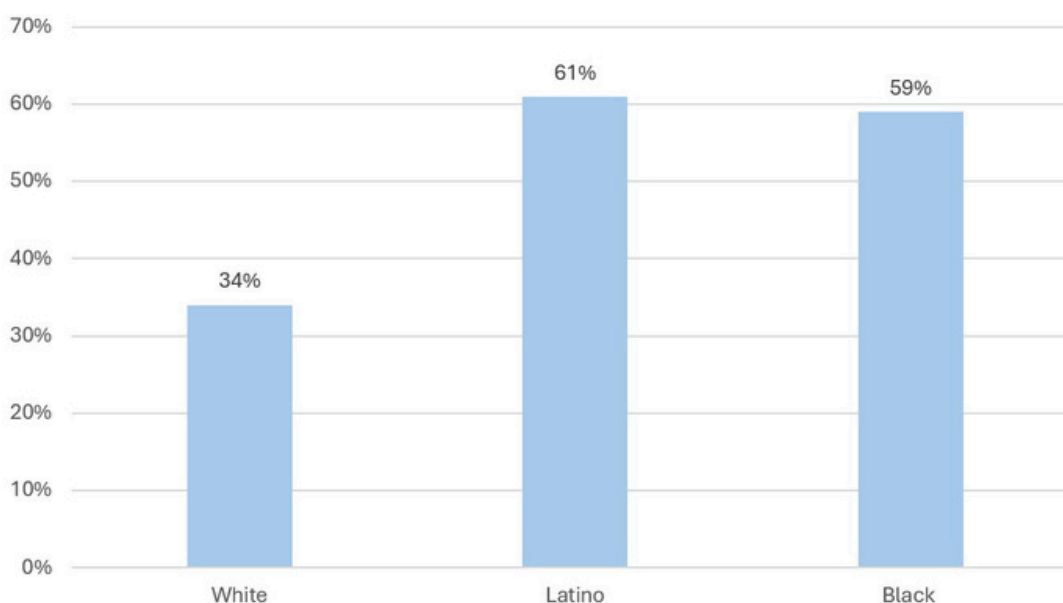
Expanding Oral
Health Access for
Children in
Colorado

July 2025

Oral Health Matters

Dental caries, also known as cavities or tooth decay, are the leading chronic disease among young children.[1] Dental caries are preventable. However, by kindergarten, nearly half of children in Colorado have already had tooth decay.[2] The issue is prevalent among children with limited access to oral health services. Children from Latino and Black households have a higher prevalence compared to children from white households.

Proportion of Colorado Kindergarteners with Treated and/or Untreated Caries, by Race and Ethnicity, 2022-23.



SOURCE: COLORADO BASIC SCREENING SURVEY, COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT, 2022-2023

Oral health screenings are critical to prevent oral caries and other oral health issues. Screening services consist of early detection followed by appropriate referrals. These can prevent oral health problems that can impact children's health across their lifespan.

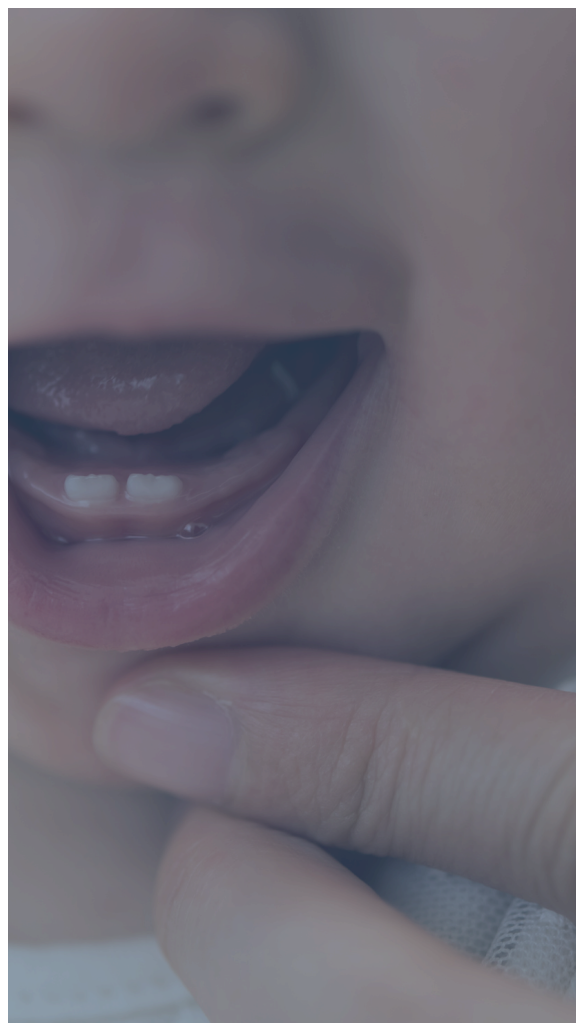
[1] [NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF DENTAL AND CRANIOFACIAL RESEARCH](#), NOVEMBER 2022.

[2] COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT, [COLORADO BASIC SCREENING SURVEY \(BSS\) DASHBOARD](#), 2022-23. MARGINS OF ERROR EXIST.

There are opportunities to expand access to preventive oral health services. One is to provide oral health screening services in child care settings. Screenings can promote equitable oral health for all children. This is especially true for those from traditionally underserved communities.

On July 1, 2026, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood will implement new quality standards for providers participating in the Universal Preschool Program (UPK).^[3] The standards include making oral health screening services available to children in UPK.

The new standards for screening are not currently associated with new funding. Early Milestones Colorado explored funding strategies to support dental screening services. This was made possible by a grant from Delta Dental Foundation of Colorado.



The role of child care health consultants

Child care health consultants (CCHCs) are licensed registered nurses, pediatric nurse practitioners, family nurse practitioners, or physicians. They have met CCHC training requirements and qualifications in Colorado. They assist licensed child care centers in meeting health and safety standards.

CCHCs support child care centers in developing policies for health and safety, illness and injury prevention, and infectious disease management. They also help with emergency preparedness, classroom consultation, and more. They provide delegation to early childhood staff to administer medications and perform health care procedures. ^[4] All licensed child care centers are required to have at least one monthly visit with a CCHC.

^[3] [COLORADO CODE OF REGULATIONS 8 CCR 1404-1.](#)

^[4] PLEASE SEE [HEALTHY CHILD CARE COLORADO](#) FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CCHCS.



Healthy Universal Preschool Collaborative

Assuring Better Child Health and Development and Healthy Child Care Colorado are partnering on a pilot program. It is called the Healthy Universal Preschool Collaborative, where CCHCs provide oral health screenings and referrals in child care facilities. Children in 11 counties attending over 100 different UPK sites are participating. Preliminary results from the pilot program will be available at the end of 2025. Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation funds this project.

Opportunities for Funding

The **School Health Services program** allows Colorado school districts and Boards of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES) to receive federal Medicaid matching funds if they provide certain services to students on Medicaid. Those federal funds totaled \$88 million in FY2022-23. They are available to deliver primary and preventive services to all children in the district when included in the districts' Local Services Plan. The services can include various types of screening and referrals.[5]

The **Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant** and the **Child Care and Development Block Grant** are two federal block grants. Some states use them to fund services provided by CHHCs in child care settings (see box above). Future levels of these block grants are uncertain. If they increase, there could be opportunities to provide funding for CCHCs in Colorado to provide screening services in childcare facilities.

[5] FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES PROGRAM, PLEASE REFER TO LRFI #4, PUBLIC SCHOOL HEALTH SERVICES, COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CARE POLICY AND FINANCING, DATED NOVEMBER 1, 2024.

Some communities use **local public health resources** to fund CCHCs to provide oral health screenings in child care facilities. The Grand County Department of Public Health funds a CCHC (.6 FTE). They collaborate with Grand Beginnings. CCHCs conduct oral health screenings, make referrals and apply fluoride varnish to children in Grand and Jackson counties. Since the inception of the program, the proportion of children with untreated dental decay has declined from 59% to 19%.

Colorado's Medicaid program, Health First Colorado, will start reimbursing for some services provided by **community health workers** (CHWs). This will begin in January 2026. With orders written by a nurse, CHWs will be able to provide oral health education services in child care facilities. Agencies employing community health workers will be able to bill Health First Colorado for these services.

Some states have used their **General Fund** to support CCHC services. The General Fund in Colorado has been limited due to the Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR). In the future, General Fund resources should be considered. There is a high return on investment associated with screening services.

The Universal Preschool Program is funded by a **ballot initiative**, Proposition EE. It was approved by Colorado voters in 2020. The funding formula for providers could incorporate the costs of the new standards for screening services.

Discussions are taking place regarding a referred measure to voters, **Move Colorado Forward**. This would provide financial relief to the struggling child care industry in Colorado. Stakeholders can elevate the importance of including financial support for health screenings.

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