



COHI

Connecticut Oral Health Initiative

ANNUAL

REPORT 2024

Advocating for Access, Quality,
& Equity in Oral Health Care



Messages from the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & BOARD



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Gary Turco

In 2024, COHI focused on identifying barriers to Medicaid service utilization and developing policy recommendations for systemic change. Through community outreach, we engaged with hundreds of oral health consumers and providers, gathering data for key reports on Connecticut's oral health challenges and potential solutions.

The organization strengthened partnerships, attended national conferences, participated in numerous task forces, secured new funding, and hired its first full-time Policy and Advocacy Director. With continued support into 2025, COHI is poised for strong growth and to advocate for critical oral health improvements and equity for all Connecticut residents.



BOARD PRESIDENT

**Dr. Brianna
Muñoz**

When considering "oral health for all," we must broaden our minds and expand our focus beyond teeth. These teeth are connected to people, and these people are inexorably bound to their communities. In a world of water fluoridation and sealants, dental decay is still the most common chronic disease of childhood with a higher propensity amongst the most marginalized groups.

By advocating on behalf of expanded access to dental services and improved quality of care, COHI is actively working with community partners to pave the way toward oral health equity.

OUR WORK THIS YEAR

- **Aimed to increase utilization of oral health Medicaid services**

- Published report on HUSKY Dental Providers' outcomes of increased Medicaid reimbursement rates
- Published report on oral health care consumer barriers and identified policy changes for a more equitable system
- Launched the Healthy Smiles, Healthy Lives campaign
- Hosted HUSKY Dental enrollee and dental provider forums

**Thank You,
Healthy Smiles,
Healthy Lives
Pledgers!**



- **Submitted scope of practice change request** to the current law to allow dental therapy to be effectively implemented in CT
- Attended the American Dental Therapy Association conference

- **Worked to improve preventative oral health services to reduce racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequities in tooth decay for children**

- Education and advocacy for preventative treatments for children, like dental sealants
- Exhibited at the 2024 Association of School-Based Health Centers conference
- **Held group discussion for individuals with special needs** to learn their difficulties when seeking oral health care, and advocate for necessary changes
- **Attended dozens of community events around CT** to connect with oral health consumers, provide oral health literacy, and engage to advocate for change



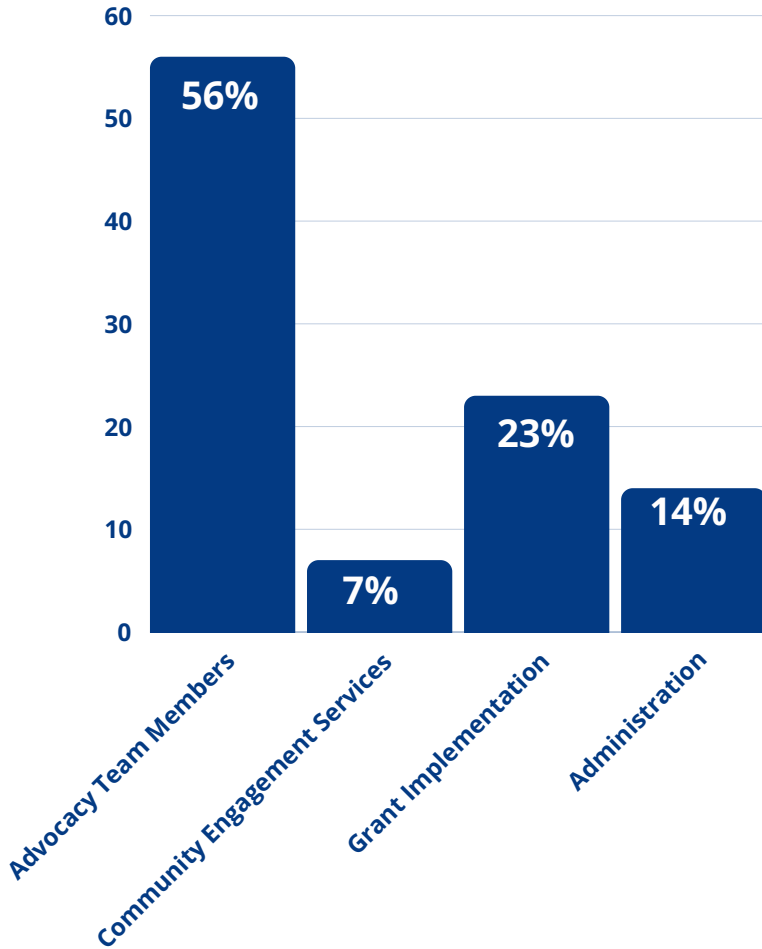
HUSKY Dental Forums

As part of a contract with the CT Department of Social Services, COHI solicited feedback on the HUSKY Dental program and recommendations for improvement. The HUSKY Health enrollee forums took place in **Hartford, New Haven, Middletown, and Willimantic, with a total of over 100 participants.**



FINANCIALS

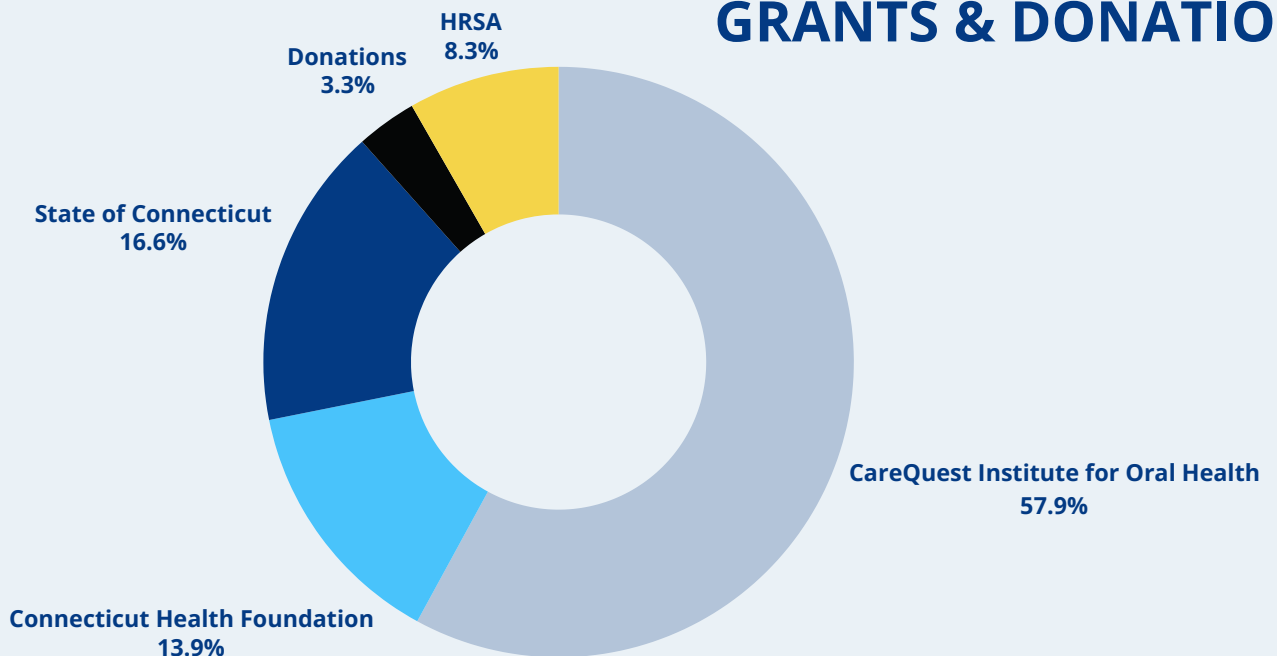
ORGANIZATION EXPENSES



THANK YOU to all our partners who make our work possible!



GRANTS & DONATIONS



REPORTS

Barriers to Access

November 2024

Providers & HUSKY

April 2024

Following an increased Medicaid private provider fee-for-service reimbursement rate for adult dental services in Connecticut for the first time in fourteen years, COHI conducted an anonymous provider survey to determine the effects of the increase on private provider participation. The survey received responses from 225 dentists.

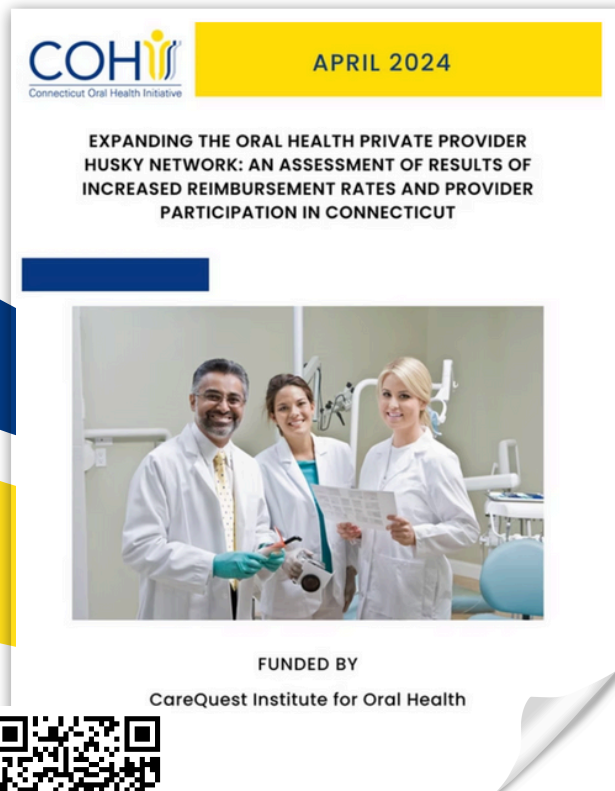
57% reported being aware of the Medicaid rate increase while 43% reported being unaware, and less than 15% reported the increase having a positive effect on their decision to continue accepting HUSKY/Medicaid, consider joining the network, or increase their patient loads. The most frequently mentioned barrier to accepting Medicaid, despite the recent increase, was low reimbursement rates and administrative burdens.

The report includes policy recommendations to make Medicaid more accessible for providers.

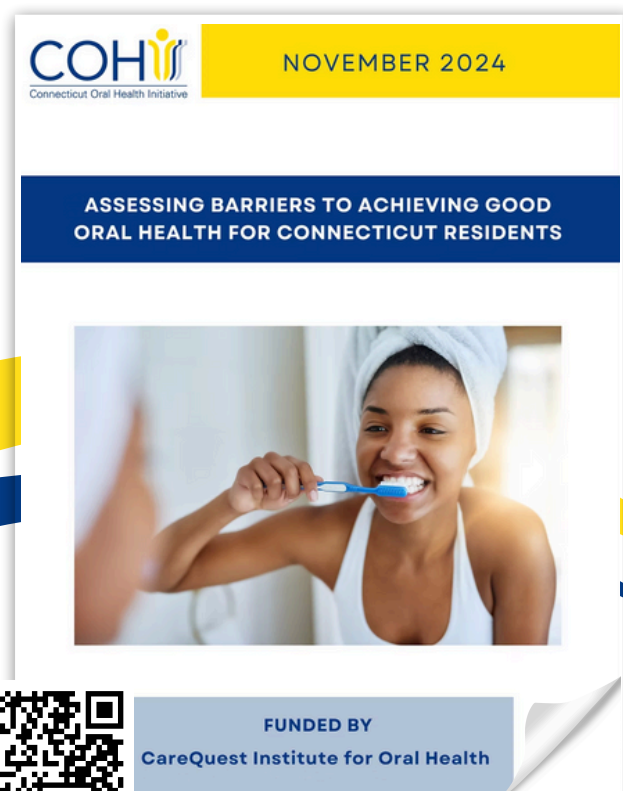
This report revealed a multi-faceted view of barriers residents face when it comes to accessing oral health care. COHI surveyed over 700 consumers in 91 Connecticut communities across several racial-ethnic groups and income levels to study the potential correlations of insurance type, ethnicity, and income with level of success accessing and maintaining good oral health.

Over 50% of respondents reported experiencing at least one barrier to accessing oral health care, citing – in order of prevalence – fear of the dental office, inconvenient dental office hours, and excessively long wait times for appointments. Nearly 56% reported that they consider their oral health to be “fair or poor.” Those enrolled in HUSKY Health or with no insurance were more likely to report barriers and/or rate their oral health as “fair or poor” than those with private insurance.

The report analyzes demographic differences across types of insurance and how insurance type impacts access, as well as outlines several policy recommendations related to increased education, training, and provider standards.



Read full report:
[ctoralhealth.org/
husky-network-provider-report](https://ctoralhealth.org/husky-network-provider-report)



Read full report:
[ctoralhealth.org/
assessing-barriers-report](https://ctoralhealth.org/assessing-barriers-report)

L.E.A.D. PARTNERSHIP

Late this year, COHI was thrilled to launch the L.E.A.D. Partnership, an initiative championing “**L**eadership in **E**quity and **A**ccess to **D**ental” care. Not only do L.E.A.D. Partners provide a financial contribution of their choice that goes directly to oral health advocacy, but they enlist as change-makers and thought partners in COHI’s work, standing at the forefront of the fight for better oral health policies in Connecticut.

L.E.A.D. Partners are a driving force behind COHI’s mission and play an active role in guiding COHI’s efforts while enjoying exclusive benefits such as invitations to advisory groups that help shape policy recommendations, discounted tickets to annual events that celebrate progress and impact, advertising opportunities to showcase their commitment to oral health equity, and more.

We know that there is power in numbers and together we can transform the oral health landscape in Connecticut. Every dollar and every voice brings us closer to a healthier, more equitable future. We are excited to continue growing this partnership program and make an even bigger impact in 2025!

Learn more at: ctoralhealth.org/leadpartner.

We’re convening a team of **oral health superheroes** who are helping to expand access, reduce inequities, and improve outcomes in oral health care.



2025 POLICY PRIORITIES

- **Enhance children's oral health** by increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates for preventative services, expanding the Access for Baby Care Program, and services regardless of immigration status.
- **Expand adult Medicaid-covered services** to include periodontal treatments and second-annual preventative visits, and exempt preventative services from the annual benefit cap.
- **Expand care for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities** by providing more resources to dental providers to increase service accessibility.
- **Advocate for a medical loss ratio standard** to ensure insurance premiums pay more for care than administrative costs.
- **Diversify the oral health workforce** through proven equity-focused strategies dedicated to serving medically underserved communities and improving oral health equity.
- **Defend community water fluoridation** by upholding research-backed, safe, and effective practices to enhance community oral health.

THANK YOU

to our partners & supporters

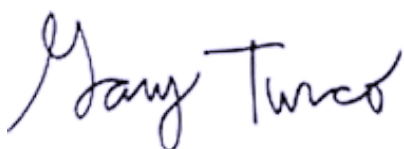
On behalf of everyone at COHI, I want to extend our deepest, heartfelt gratitude for your support this year.

Your partnership plays a crucial role in our mission to improve oral health for all Connecticut residents. Together, we are breaking down barriers, building healthier communities, and driving needed change.

As we look ahead to 2025, I invite you to join us as a L.E.A.D Partner. **Together, we can further elevate our advocacy work and create lasting impact that paves the way for a healthier, more equitable future.**

Everyone deserves access to quality, affordable oral health care. Thank you for being part of the work to get us there!

In community,



Executive Director



COHI
Connecticut Oral Health Initiative

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