

Fact Sheet



Contributing Factors to American Indian/ Alaskan Native Elders' Quality of Life

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Background

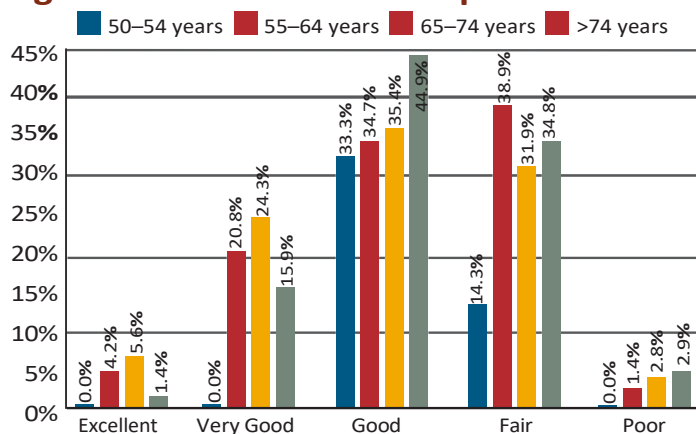
Oral health and sense of hearing are important components of an elder's general health and well-being. The *Oral Health of Older Americans* found that more elders are keeping their natural teeth than ever before; however, there are sharp differences in natural teeth retention that vary by race and economic status.¹ Overall, non-Hispanic blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians and Alaska Natives generally have the poorest oral health of any racial and ethnic groups in the United States.⁶ In 2006, 37 million adults in the United States had trouble hearing (ranging from a little trouble to being deaf). Men (4.3%) were more likely than women (2.4%) to be deaf or experience more trouble hearing. Non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native (A/AN) adults had the highest rates of reported hearing trouble amongst any race/ethnicity groups studied by the Center of Disease Control in the study of health disparities among adults with hearing loss: United States, 2000-2006.¹

Key Information

The participants from the "National Indian Council on Aging, Inc. (NICOA) Needs Assessment" included 533 females (77.9%) and 135 males (19.7%). Participants were also divided into four age groups: 50-54 years (2.1%), 55-64 years (33.6%), 65-74 years (43.6%), 74 years and over (18.6%).

- Participants age >74 with a perceived health status of "good" reported the highest percentage (44.9%) of trouble hearing.
- Males with perceived health status of "good" reported a higher percentage (37.5%) of dentist or dental hygienist visits in the past year.

Figure 1. Percent of Self-Reported Good Health by Trouble Hearing and Age Group



The collaborative partners wish to thank the NICOA Elders for being an inspiration to us and for their contribution to the life of our people.



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Figure 2. Percent of Males and Females Indicating Perceived Health Status, Who Visited a Dentist or Dental Hygienist in the Past Year and Gender



Conclusions/Implications

About one-third of Americans between the ages 65 and 74 have hearing problems. Dental problems in people are among the most common health problems experienced by the elderly.² In 1981, the NICOA Survey, Health Status of Urban Indian Elders, elders self-reported their health status as poor (15%), while in 2014, only 3.2% indicated poor health. In 1981, 33% of elders reported they were in fair health while in 2014 29% indicated they were in fair health. In 1981, 33.2% of elders reported dental problems, while in 2014, 31.3% reported not seeing a dentist in the past year. In 1981, 21% of elders reported hearing problems, while in 2014 44.4% reported hearing problems. Although this project indicates that oral health has improved, hearing problems have escalated and continue to be a contributing factor for AI/AN elders indicating a continued need for services.

Warning Signs for Dental Problems

- Changing bad breath
- Dry mouth
- Canker sores
- Receding gums, tooth cavities, hypersensitivity, and discoloration of the teeth.⁴

Prevention

- Brushing at least twice a day, flossing, and mouth washing
- Regular checkups.⁴

Warning Signs for Hearing Loss

- Ringing or buzzing in ears after exposure to noise
- Experiencing fullness in ears after leaving a noisy area
- Being able to hear people talk but not understanding them after exposure to noise.⁵

Prevention

- Avoid loud noises, wear hearing protection such as earplugs, and regular hearing tests.⁵

References

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Oral Health: Preventing Cavities, Gum Disease, Tooth Loss, and Oral Cancers. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.

² Vargas, D.D.S, Ph.D., C., Kramarow, Ph.D., E., & Yellowitz, D.M.D., M.P.H., J. (2001). *The Oral Health of Older Adults*, 3. Retrieved July 22, 2015, from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ahcd/agingtrends/03oral.pdf>.

³ Kramer, B. (1999). The Health Status of Urban Indian Elders. PsycEXTRA Dataset, 1-4. Retrieved July 27, 2015, from http://www.ihs.gov/Provider/documents/1990_1999/PROV0599.pdf.

⁴ Hall, BS, S., Stensland, BA, P., & Morin-Carter, PhD, P. (2014). Oral Health in Native American Elderly. National Resource Center on Native American Aging.

⁵ Professional Hearing Associate. (2015, July, 01). Women have more hearing problems than men? [Web log post]. Retrieved on July 6, 2015 from <http://www.hearinginfo.net/blog/do-men-have-more-hearing-problems-than-women>.

⁶ Disparities in Oral Health. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 20 Mar. 2015. Web. 3 Aug. 2015.

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Contact Information

For more information, contact: The NIEJI project has been retired, but they have granted NIJII permission to share materials.

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