

# Assessing Postpartum Oral Health Literacy and Needs as Medicaid Dental Coverage Expands

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**Background** Early Childhood Caries (ECC) remains the most common chronic disease among US children yet only 32% of 0–3-year-olds had a dental visit in 2019. Educating pregnant patients about the importance of evidenced- based oral health practices for infants/children is integral to decreasing the percentage of childhood tooth decay in America, yet only 29% of Medicaid- enrolled pregnant patients had a dental visit in 2019. Enhancing oral health messages for prenatal people as Maryland prenatal Medicaid dental coverage is extended to a year post-delivery (beginning April 2022) could increase the percentage of babies linked to dental homes by age one.

**Objective**

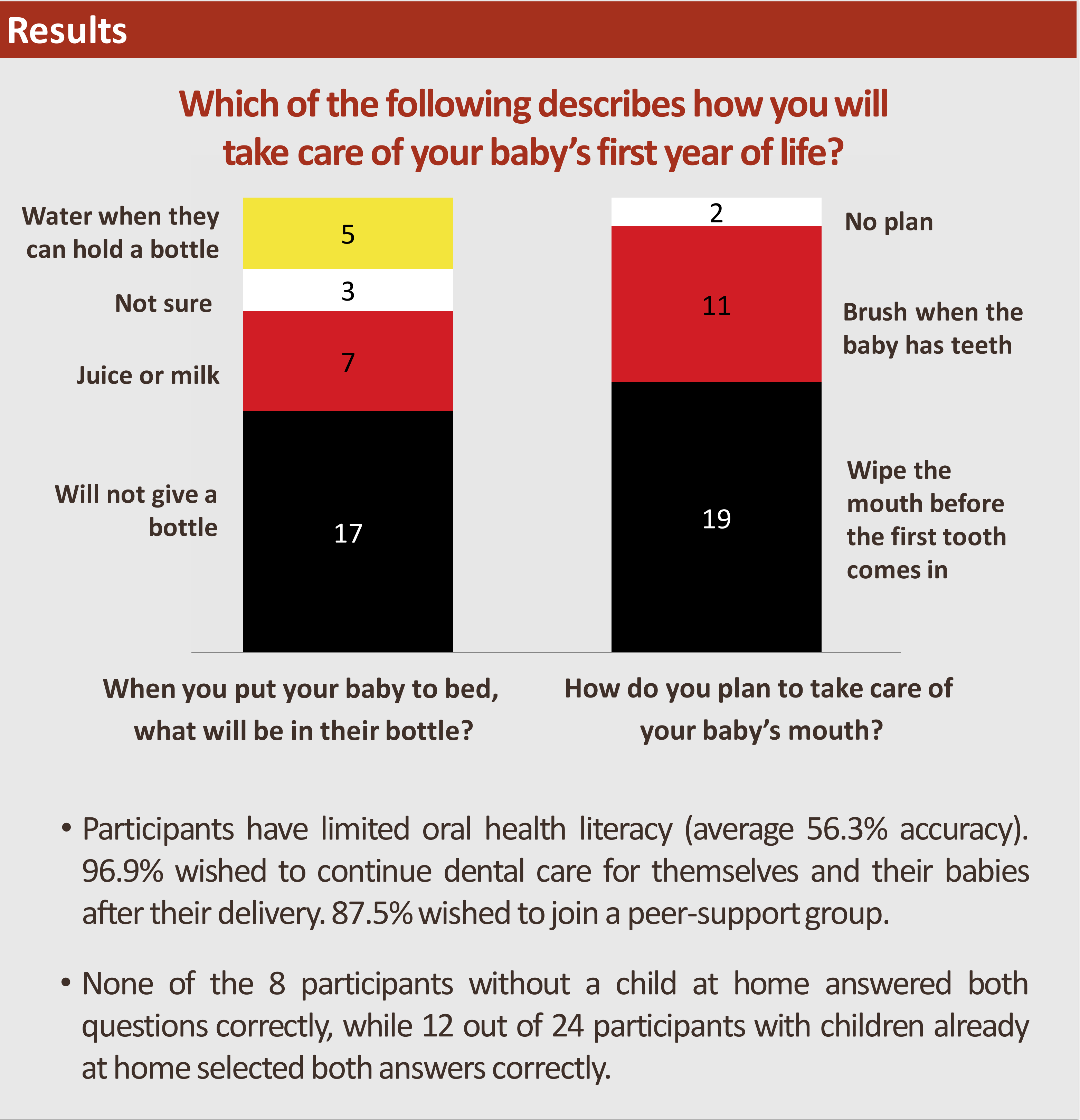
- The objective of our pilot study was two-fold, we aimed to assess the oral health literacy and perceived need for dental care services and peer support of pregnant patients in a university -based prenatal oral health program.
- The over-arching goal of this study is to enhance the oral health literacy for pregnant people.

**Method**

- IRB determined this project non-human subject research (NHSR) on 10/25/2021.
- A convenience sample of 32 pregnant patients referred from a women's health center to the dental school or who attended a Woman’s Center sponsored baby shower answered a 6-question multiple choice survey. Researchers explained the purpose of the survey and relayed the correct answers and rationale for the knowledge-based questions at the end of the survey to further educate the patients.
- Surveys were conducted either by paper or through Qualtrics, an online survey tool.



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**Discussion & Limitations**

- Study results demonstrated limited oral health literacy, that participants' wish to continue with dental care services after delivery, and to find a peer-group for postpartum support.
- Survey results were collected from participants that had dental appointments or from those that attended a virtual baby shower, an informative seminar regarding health promotion. Therefore, survey results were collected from participants with some interest in oral health.
- Paper surveys were distributed and collected by students during the participants dental appointments. Presence of provider may have influenced participant responses.
- The small sample size and disproportional amount of participants with children resulted in statistically insignificant correlation ( $R^2= 24.5\%$ ).

**Conclusion**

- A university-based prenatal oral health program could be enhanced to include evidenced-based oral health practices for infants and children which could increase the percentage of babies linked to a dental home by age one.
- A larger study is needed to collect more statistically significant data and to determine barriers to dental care access for referred patients who did not report to the dental school for care.

**References**

- 2020 Annual oral health legislative report
- Early Childhood Dental Caries: A Rising Dental Public Health Crisis <https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2013.14.2.191>