

Bridging the Gap in Pediatric Preventative Dental Care In California

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INTRODUCTION

Dental caries remains one of the most prevalent chronic childhood diseases. Evidence-based preventive strategies including caries risk assessment, fluoride therapy, dental sealants, OHI, and dietary counseling, are routinely performed by both general dentists and pediatric dentists to improve oral health outcomes. However, provider, patient, and systemic factors may influence the implementation of preventive care.

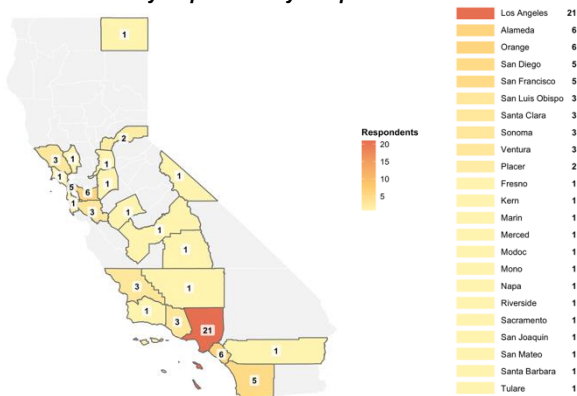
Objective: This study evaluated preventive practices, perceived barriers, and attitudes toward preventive dentistry among general dentists and pediatric dentists in California (CA).

METHODS

Study Design: [IRB-25-0065] A 30-Q cross-sectional Knowledge, Attitudes and Perceived Barrier-Practices (KAP) survey was distributed through AAPD, CDA, and California Dental Societies email listings from Aug-Dec 2025 via Qualtrics.

Data Analysis: Descriptive statistics summarized survey responses. Two-sample t-tests compared technical knowledge scores. Ordinal and response categories (Always, Often, Rarely, Never) were used to facilitate comparison of distribution patterns. "Strongly Agree" and "Totally Agree" from Likert scale questions were combined to represent overall agreement. Chi-Square tests and Fisher's exact tests were used to evaluate differences between general and pediatric dentists with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

CA County Map of Survey Respondents



RESULTS

A total of 101 surveys were received, of which 66 respondents met inclusion criteria of completion and were included in the final analysis:

- 32 General Dentists and 34 Pediatric Dentists

Technical Knowledge: Pediatric Preventative Care scores were generally high among both provider groups, with pediatric dentists *demonstrating higher* median knowledge scores than general dentists.

**No statistical significance observed between general and pediatric dentists*

Figure 1. Provider Attitudes on Preventative Care

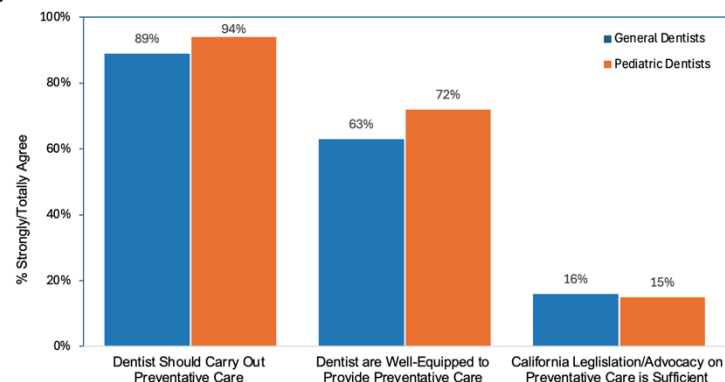
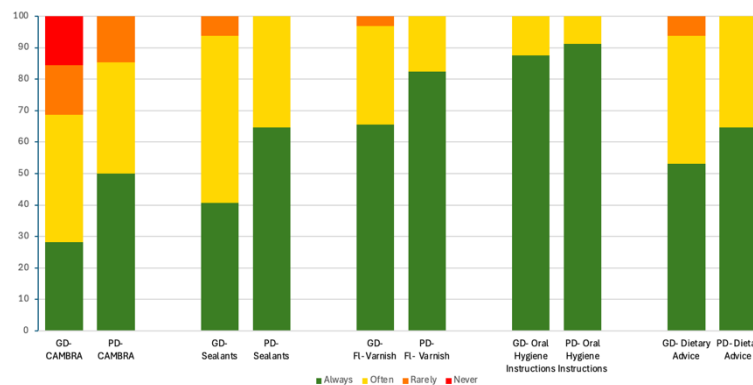


Figure 2. Preventative Care Practices



*Data collected from Aug-Dec 2025

Figure 3. Provider's Perceived Barriers in Delivering Preventative Care

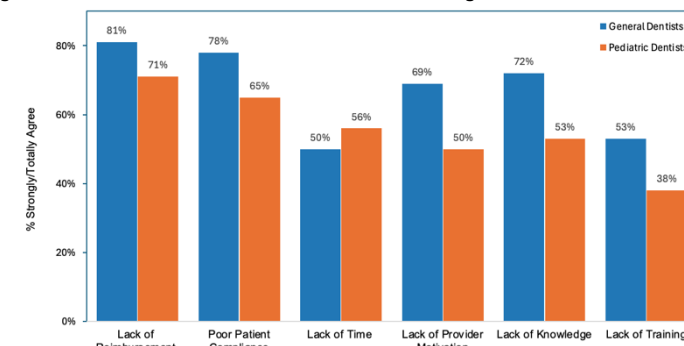
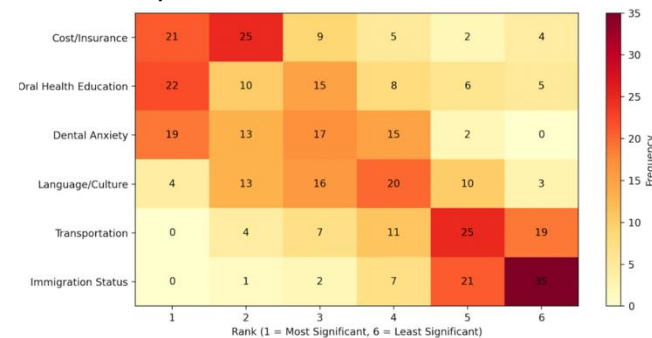


Figure 4. Provider Perception of *Patient Barriers to Preventative Care



CONCLUSIONS

Preventive dentistry is widely supported and practiced among dentists in California; however multiple barriers exist at the **provider, patient, and systemic level**. Reimbursement and patient cost were the most frequently reported structural challenges. Providers also perceived poor patient compliance, education and dental anxiety as limitations to delivering preventative care. In addition, provider-level factors, including gaps in knowledge, training, motivation, and time constraints, may affect confidence and consistency in implementing preventative services. Notably, majority indicated a greater need for state legislative support and advocacy.

Expanding preventive dentistry in California requires coordinated policy support alongside efforts to address systemic barriers and support providers and patients in overcoming behavioral and educational challenges.

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References