

Dental Health and Perceptions of Thompson Center Patients and Their Caregivers

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Background

- The Thompson Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment is a medical clinic that provides medical, psychiatric, and developmental treatment for pediatric patients.
- Oral health is a significant concern in children, with the CDC reporting that 50% of children aged 6-9 have at least one decayed, filled, or missing primary or permanent tooth.¹
- Children with physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities have an even higher prevalence of dental caries with one study showing that 67.1% of participants were affected.² Poor diet and difficulties achieving adequate toothbrushing contribute to poor dental outcomes in this population.³
- This poster aims to identify barriers to dental care, understand caregiver perceptions, and assess the oral health status of children with neurodevelopmental disabilities who currently or have previously seen a provider at the Thompson Center. By educating clinicians, we hope to enhance patient care and health outcomes.

Methods

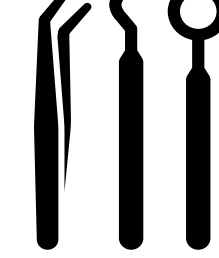
- This project occurred in two phases.
- Phase 1: Two dental health questions were incorporated into the standard clinic intake forms completed by caregivers prior to appointments. Data was collected between December of 2023 and June of 2024 with responses from 800 unique patients.
- Phase 2: REDCap was used to develop a caregiver survey in collaboration with a multidisciplinary team including a dentist, occupational therapist, developmental-behavioral pediatrician, and medical students.
- The survey consisted of 47 questions addressing oral health habits, challenges, and access to care. It was distributed via email to the caregivers of patients seen in the medical clinics over the past two years. 192 responses were collected.
- Respondents ranged in age between 7 months and 17 years. 56 were female, 124 were male, and 1 was non-conforming. Clinical diagnoses included: Autism, ADHD, CP, ID, OCD, Developmental Delay, Down syndrome, Genetic Diagnosis, Anxiety, Learning disability, Prematurity, and prolonged NICU stays.

Results

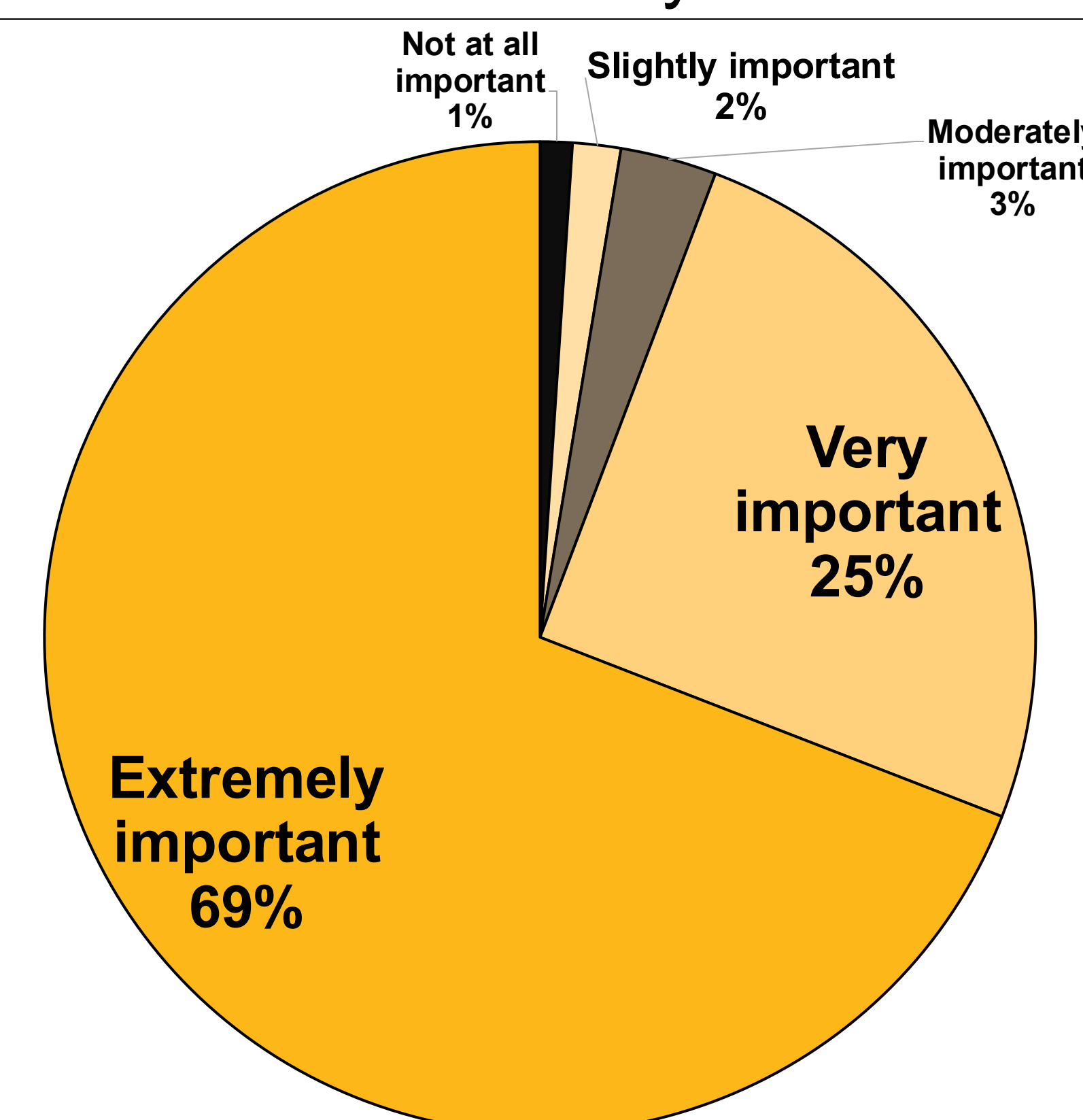
Has the patient had fluoride varnish applied in the last 3 months?

No, 460  Yes, 340

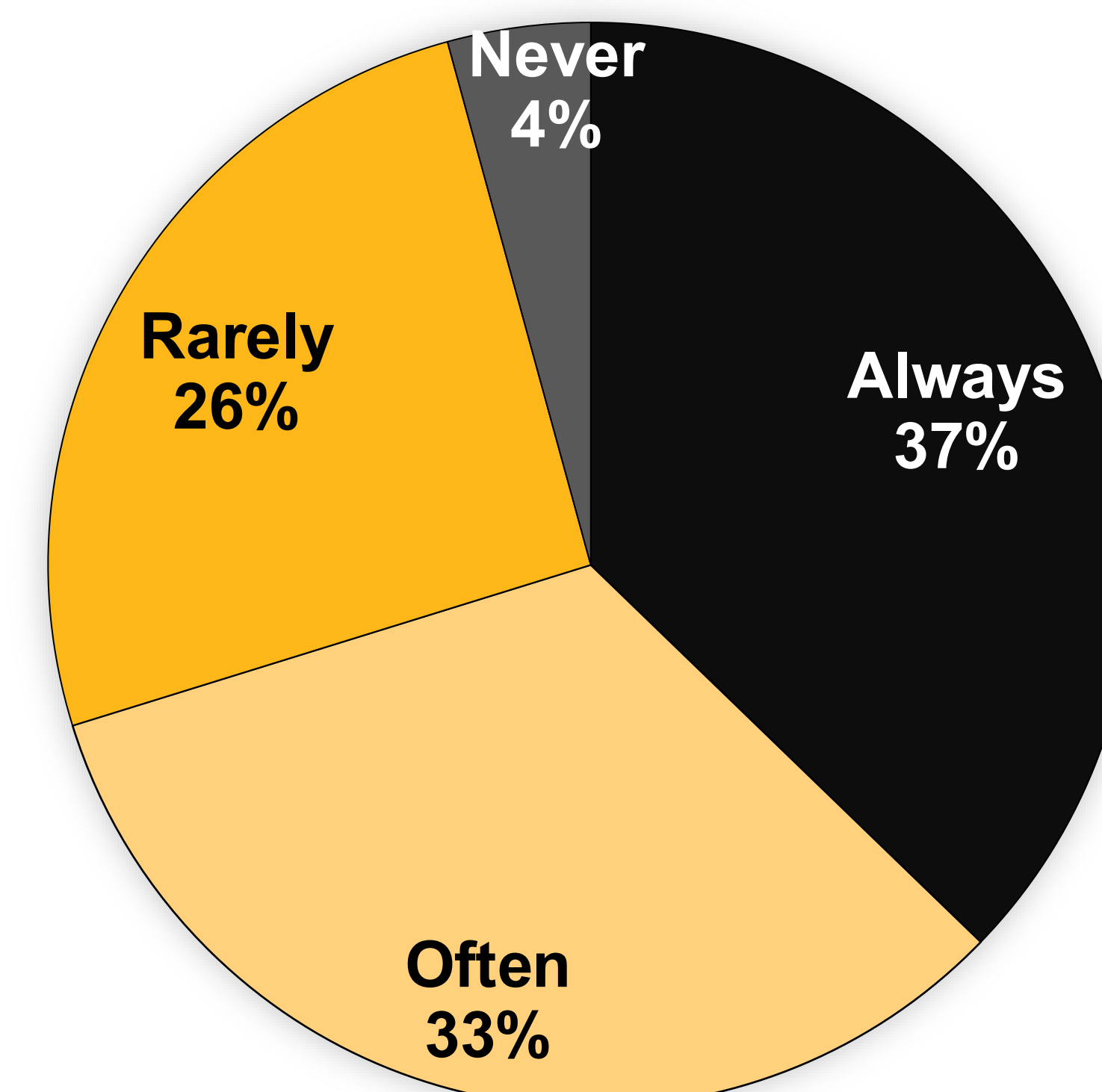
Has the patient seen a dentist in the last 6 months?

No, 296  Yes, 504

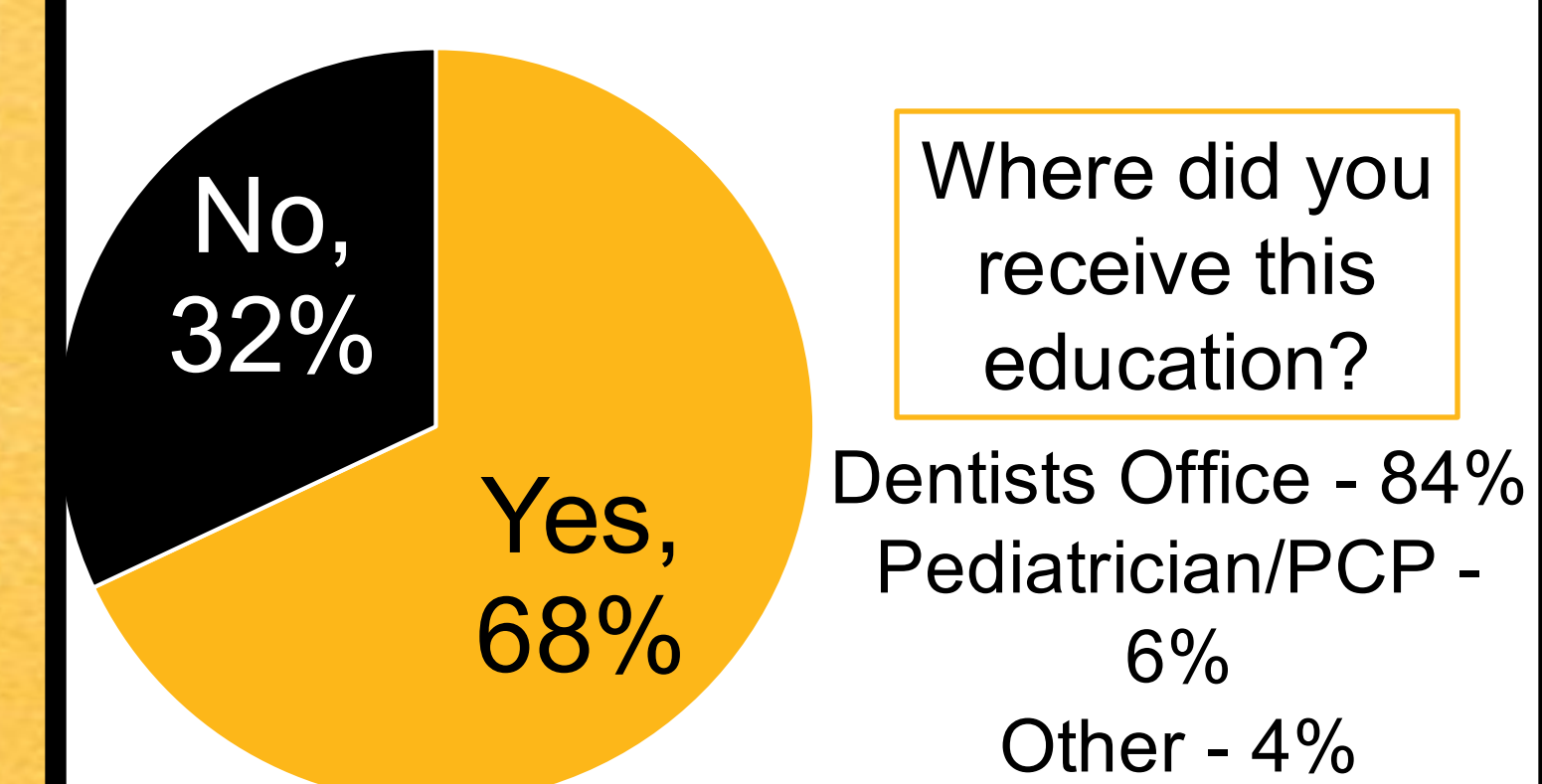
How important do you believe dental care is for your child?



How often does your child brush their teeth before sleep?



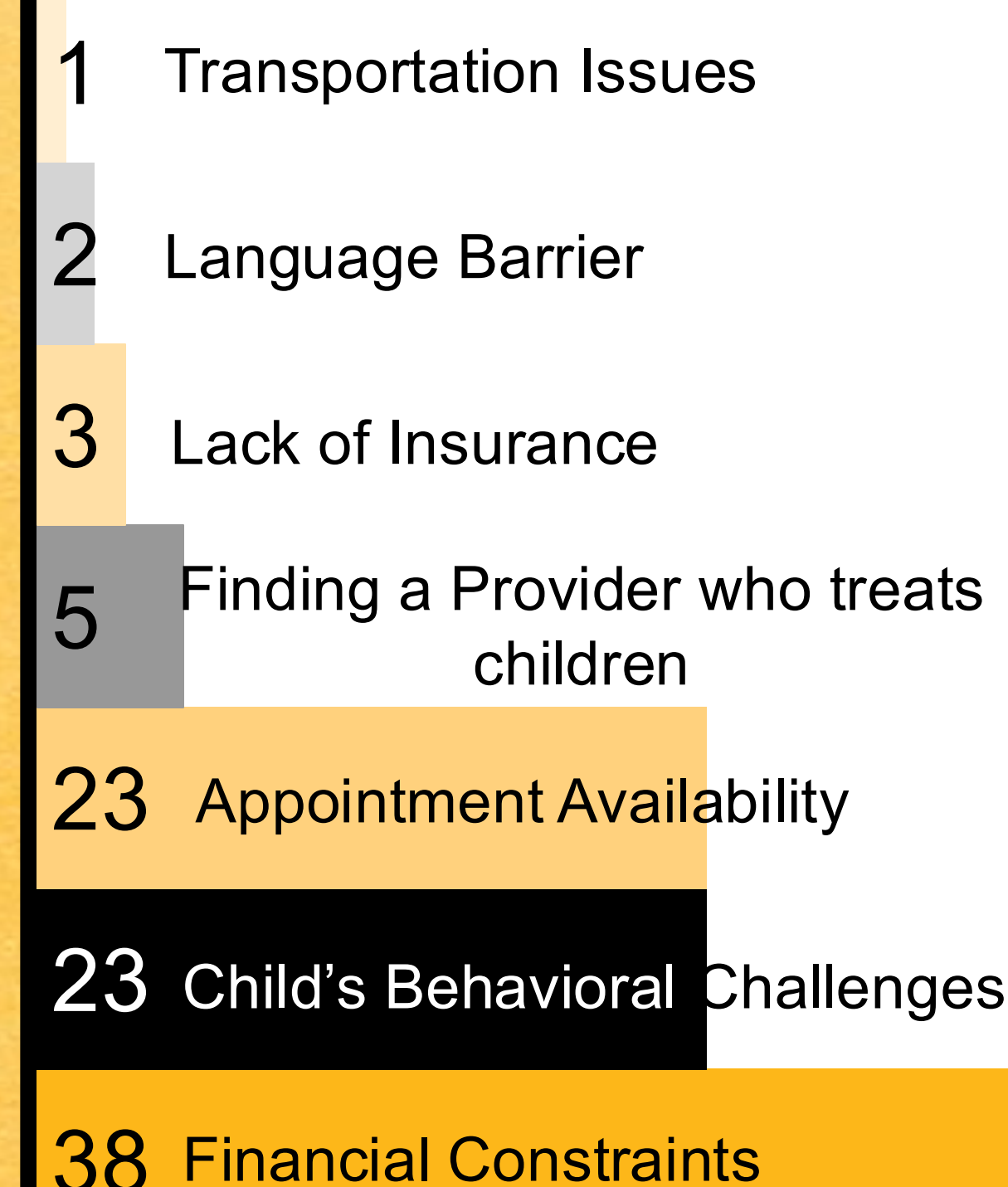
Have you received education on how to brush your child's teeth?



Where did you receive this education?

Dentists Office - 84%
Pediatrician/PCP - 6%
Other - 4%
Online Resources - 4%
Public Health Department/WIC - 2%
Family/Friends - 1%

What difficulties in access are most impactful?



Discussion

- The CDC reported that 17% of children aged 6–9 years have untreated dental decay.¹ In comparison, 22% of children in this age range at our clinic were reported to have untreated decay, suggesting a potential gap in access to dental care.
- Fluoride varnish can be applied up to 4 times a year and represents a preventative service that could be offered at the Thompson Center.⁴ This approach may help reduce the incidence of dental caries in our patient population.
- 32% of our respondents had not been taught how to brush their child's teeth. This highlights an opportunity for our clinic to provide that education through materials and demonstrations distributed during medical or therapy appointments.
- Financial constraints were the most frequently reported barrier to accessing dental care, which is particularly relevant as most of our patients are insured through Medicaid. Further investigation into specific financial barriers is necessary to address potential systemic barriers and solutions.
- Behavioral challenges were also a frequently reported barrier and could be addressed through medical strategies such as sedation and educational supports, such as directing families to the Thompson Center's Autism Friendly Business initiative.

Autism Friendly Businesses

These businesses are dedicated to enhancing accessibility and improving the experience for autistic customers, clients, or visitors and can take part in training to implement best practices for creating an inclusive environment for autistic employees.⁵



bit.ly/AutismFriendlyBusiness

Citations

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024b, October 9). 2024 Oral Health Surveillance Report: Selected Findings. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/oral-health/php/2024-oral-health-surveillance-report/selected-findings.html>
- Misrabi, A., Sharma, D., Sharma, M., Uppal, S., & Sadal, M. (2024). Prevalence of dental caries and oral hygiene among specially-abled children. *Bioinformation*, 20(10), 1238–1243. <https://doi.org/10.6026/9732063002001238>
- Bui, S., & Meyer, B. D. (2022, April 18). Caries and Oral Health Behaviors Among Children With and Without Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. *JAMA Pediatrics*. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/486126>
- American Academy of Pediatrics. (2015, May 15). Fluoride varnish: What parents need to know. *HealthyChildren.org*. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/oral-health/Pages/Fluoride-Varnish-What-Parents-Need-to-Know.aspx>
- Autism friendly business. Thompson Center for Autism & Neurodevelopment. (2025, March 10). <https://thompsoncenter.missouri.edu/afb/>