

Apeksha Phulgirkar

M.P.H. Candidate, Global Health Track

apeksha.phulgirkar@vanderbilt.edu

Practicum Site: New York State Dental Foundation

Practicum Site Supervisor: Stacy Mcilduff, C.F.R.E.

Bridging the Dental Care Gap: Addressing Oral Health Disparities in New York State Nursing Homes



Introduction: The New York State Dental Foundation (NYSDF) is dedicated to improving oral health across New York, with a focus on underserved communities. Since 1980, the Foundation has worked to decrease dental care disparities through initiatives like screenings, awareness campaigns, and support for vulnerable populations, including veterans, children, and individuals with disabilities. The recent closure of clinics has highlighted the need to expand mobile dental units to ensure equitable access to quality care for all New Yorkers.

Methods: The NYSDF developed a database using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, CDC, and the New York State Department of Health to assess dental care resources and needs across New York State. The analysis included demographic data, an inventory of mobile dental vans, and the availability of in-house dental care in nursing homes. Geographic Information System (ArcGIS) software was used to map these resources, revealing disparities in access to care.

Results: The analysis identified significant challenges with access to dental care, especially in rural areas where 21.55% of the population lives, with 14.24% in Healthcare Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs). Only 198 out of 606 nursing homes in the state offer in-house dental care, worsening access for vulnerable populations, including those with disabilities and the elderly. These findings emphasize the urgent need to expand mobile dental services.

Conclusions: Acquiring a mobile dental van is essential for the NYSDF to improve access to dental care in underserved areas. This investment will ensure consistent, high-quality dental services in regions with provider shortages, significantly enhancing the oral health of vulnerable populations across New York State.