



# The 2024 **State of America's Oral Health and Wellness Report**

Commissioned by Delta Dental Plans Association





# Table of contents

2 < **Foreword from James W. Hutchison,  
President & CEO, Delta Dental Plans Association**

3 < Adults increasingly understand the vital role of oral health in overall wellness, including the link to specific chronic conditions

5 < Proper oral hygiene can support mental health

7 < **A message from Joseph Dill, DDS, MBA,  
Chief Dental Officer, Delta Dental Plans Association**

8 < More adults adhere to preventive oral health care habits to avoid serious dental and financial repercussions

10 < Preventive dental visits are on the rise while unexpected visits decline

11 < Dental insurance coverage among adults reaches a 5-year high

14 < About the research

# Foreword from James W. Hutchison

**President & CEO, Delta Dental Plans Association**

This year's "State of America's Oral Health and Wellness Report" fuels optimism about our nation's health because it reflects a continued understanding of oral health's vital role in overall wellness. The annual report commissioned by Delta Dental provides data and analysis regarding the oral and overall health behaviors of adults and children across the country, and this year's report provides new insight into consumers' recognition of oral health's link to chronic conditions, oral hygiene's connection to mental health, and the benefits of routine preventive care.

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One particularly notable finding is that an overwhelming majority of adults (91%) believe that a dental visit is as important as an annual physical. At Delta Dental, we know that oral health is critical to person-centered care, similar to annual check-ups, preventive screenings, and vaccinations, and this finding demonstrates that Americans recognize this, too.

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The increasing prioritization of oral health across the country is underscored by the fact that dental coverage among adults reached a 5-year high. This commitment to oral health is echoed in other aspects of whole person health and wellness, including physical, mental, and financial health - all of which support positive health outcomes.

As the nation's leading dental benefits provider and oral health philanthropist, Delta Dental remains closely engaged in collaboration across the health care industry to develop solutions that advance oral health and wellness. With an increased focus on whole person health, we expect to see continued improvement in overall health outcomes.



**James W. Hutchison**  
**President & CEO,**  
Delta Dental Plans Association

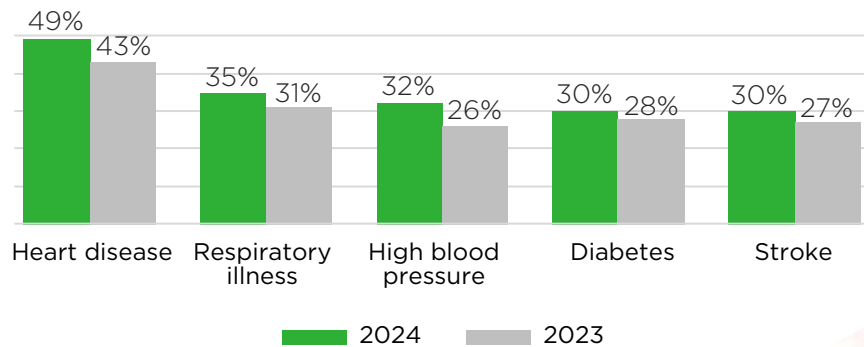


# Adults increasingly understand the vital role of oral health in overall wellness, including the link to specific chronic conditions

**Adults continue to understand the important relationship between oral health and overall well-being.** In fact, 92% believe their oral health is closely connected to their overall health, and 96% of parents recognize this link in their children, which is consistent with previous years.

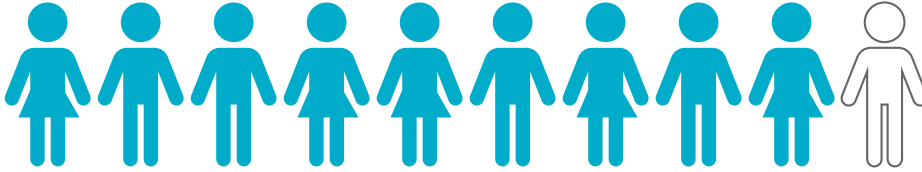
**Notably, more adults connect poor oral health to specific health conditions and diseases compared to 2023.** This is good news from an oral health education standpoint.

Percentage of adults who understand the connection between oral health and specific health conditions





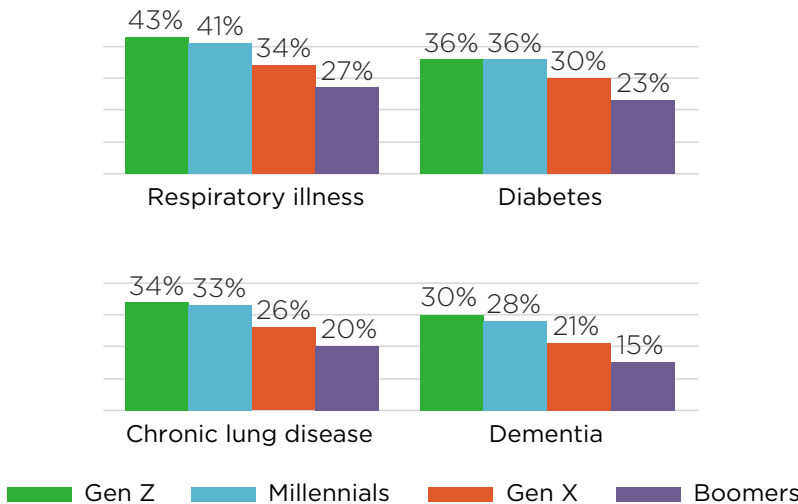
That is why over 9 in 10 adults (91%) believe that a dental visit is as important as an annual physical.



Interestingly, younger cohorts take a more holistic view, with Gen Z and Millennials most likely to appreciate oral health's connection to specific conditions. Exposure to health information via social media could contribute to this generational gap.

### GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Percentage of adults who understand the connection between oral health and specific health conditions



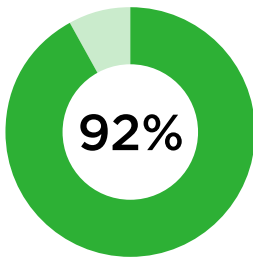
“Oral health is not just about a healthy smile; it’s intricately linked to our overall well-being. This year’s report underscores a crucial shift in consumer awareness, recognizing the profound connection between oral health and chronic health conditions. Understanding and prioritizing oral health is about more than teeth; it’s about safeguarding against systemic illnesses, fostering better quality of life, and promoting holistic health.”



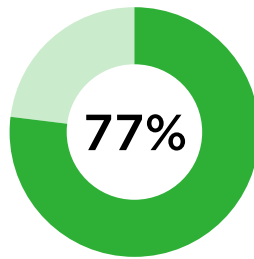
Paul O’Kane, DDS  
Dental Director,  
Delta Dental of Idaho

## Proper oral hygiene can support mental health

**Great oral health provides peace of mind.** More than 9 in 10 adults believe taking action to protect their oral health allows them to be more confident while over 3 in 4 say oral health is closely connected to mental well-being.



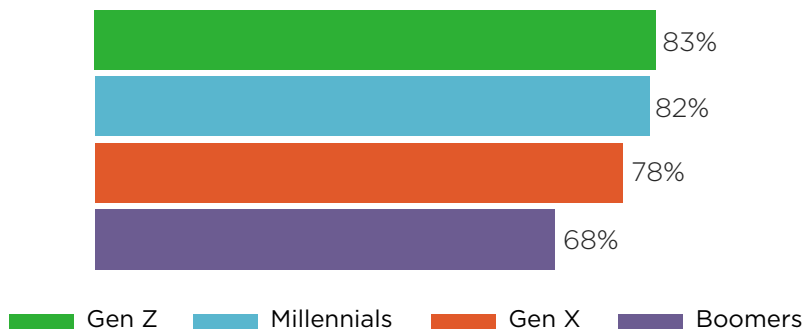
Adults who agree taking action to protect oral health enables them to be **more confident**



Adults who agree taking action to protect oral health is closely connected to their **mental health**

### GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

**Younger generations are more likely than Boomers to say that oral health is closely tied to mental health**



**When adults and children do not adhere to good oral health habits, it can negatively impact their mental health.** About 1 in 5 adults have said they became anxious, lost sleep, or felt embarrassed about their appearance, while 1 in 7 felt sad and had their mood drop. This could stem from the sense of social isolation or embarrassment people feel when dental issues impact how they look and feel – especially among younger generations. In fact, 16% of Gen Z respondents indicated they have skipped a social engagement such as concerts, birthdays, or weddings due to dental problems.

## Mental health consequences for adults resulting from oral health issues



**21%**

Became anxious



**18%**

Lost sleep



**18%**

Embarrassed about appearance

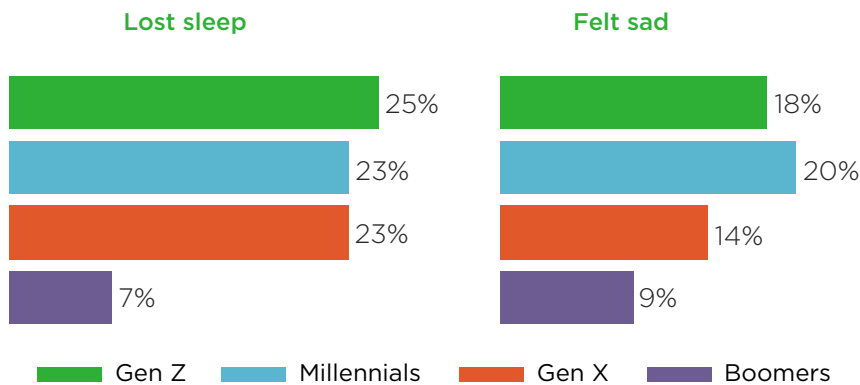


**15%**

Felt sad

## GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

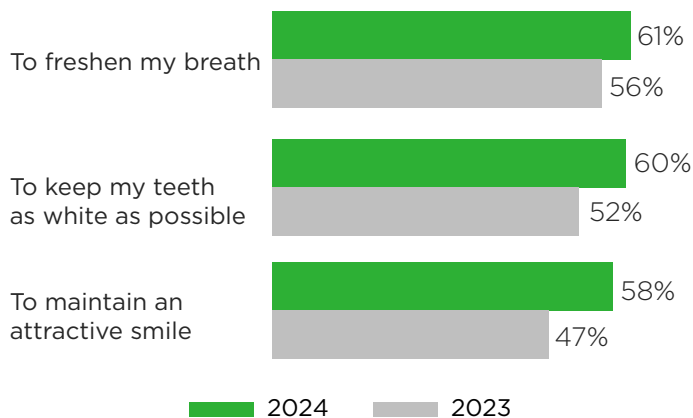
Younger generations are more likely to lose sleep and feel sad when experiencing dental issues. With increased conversations around mental health in recent years, there may be a reduction in stigma related to acknowledging these emotional impacts.



Additionally, just over 2 in 3 (67%) parents are at least *somewhat concerned* that their child's oral health issues will impact their overall confidence.

**With all this in mind, adults are increasingly motivated to maintain oral health to support their personal appearance.**

### Personal appearance motivators for brushing teeth



“The relationship between oral health and a person's mental state is profound. Ignoring dental care can not only lead to discomfort but can also contribute to feelings of embarrassment, isolation, and even bullying. This highlights the urgency of prioritizing comprehensive oral care for one's mental well-being.”



Kassandra Kulb, DMD  
Dental Director,  
Delta Dental of Kentucky



# A message from Joseph Dill, DDS, MBA

**Chief Dental Officer, Delta Dental Plans Association**

Investing in preventive oral health habits is paramount to maintaining overall well-being, and encouragingly, this year's report reveals that adults have a strong grasp of this connection.

More adults are motivated to practice proper oral health care to avoid serious dental and financial repercussions compared to last year.

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As a dentist for more than 40 years, I know firsthand that adhering to good at-home oral care practices can significantly reduce the risk of cavities and gum disease, and in turn, reduce the likelihood of developing chronic health conditions such as heart disease, respiratory disease, and diabetes.

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Further, the good news extends to the dental office, with more adults making preventive visits than the year prior, and it is notable that there is a corresponding reduction in unexpected visits. Importantly, the report emphasizes the essential role of dental insurance in motivating people to seek the recommended twice yearly preventive cleanings.

That said, there is work to be done to instill better dental hygiene practices with children. Parents face challenges overcoming those tempting sugary snacks and inconsistent brushing and flossing routines. Establishing these habits early on sets the foundation for a lifetime of good oral health.

By prioritizing preventive oral health care, adults and children not only maintain a healthy smile, but commit to a cornerstone for safeguarding their overall wellness and quality of life.



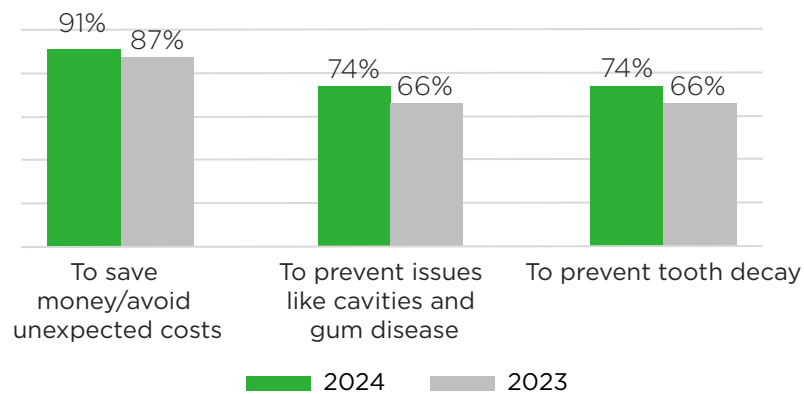
**Joseph Dill, DDS, MBA**  
**Chief Dental Officer,**  
Delta Dental Plans Association

# More adults adhere to preventive oral health care habits to avoid serious dental and financial repercussions

Throughout the past year, adults' dental hygiene was largely consistent with American Dental Association oral health guidelines, as they increasingly look to prevent serious dental issues and save money down the road. In fact, approximately 3 in 4 met the criteria for brushing, rinsing, and flossing.

Protecting their teeth against cavities, disease, and decay are the top brushing motivators, while over 9 in 10 say being able to keep their pockets fuller in the long run is a good reason to maintain their oral health habits.

Top motivators of proper oral care



## CHILDREN'S SPOTLIGHT

Kids are largely following recommended dental hygiene habits, but parents still have several obstacles to overcome to ensure their good oral health

### Parents are making sure their children follow recommended guidelines.

Almost 3 in 4 children brush at least twice daily (72%), while approximately 1 in 2 rinse (54%) or floss (50%) once per day.

However, there is room for improvement. For parents who admit their child's oral health is not superb, contributing factors include sugary snacks and inconsistent habits.

Parents say their child's oral health is not as good as it could be because they...



**49%**

eat too many sweets  
(vs. 46% in 2023)



**46%**

do not floss enough  
(vs. 44% in 2023)



**43%**

do not brush enough  
(vs. 40% in 2023)

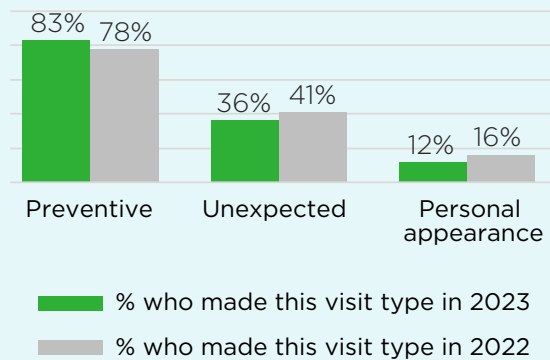




## Preventive dental visits are on the rise while unexpected visits decline

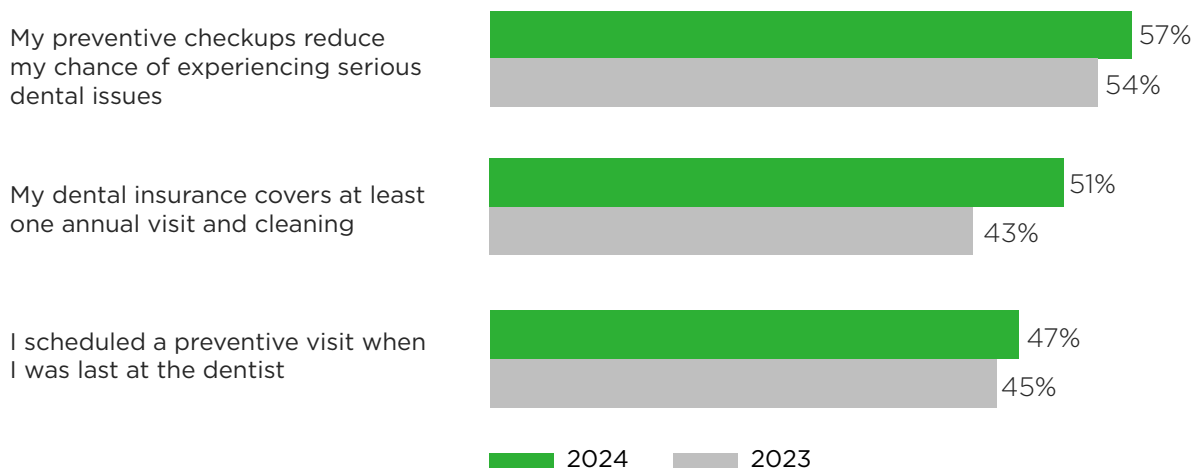
Encouragingly, preventive care visits have increased over the past year, and adults expect this trend to continue into 2024. Notably, there is a corresponding reduction in unexpected visits to the dentist.

Types of dental visits made by adults



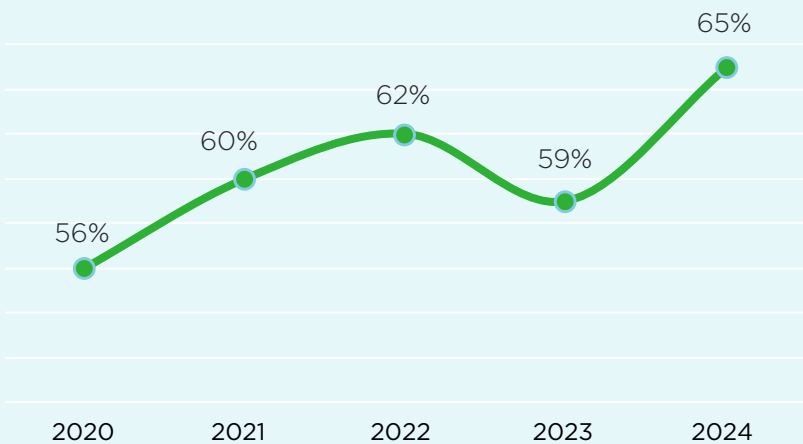
Preventive care motivators are up across the board - with adults seeking to maximize insurance benefits and avoid bigger issues in the future.

Top motivators for making a preventive dental visit



# Dental insurance coverage among adults reaches a 5-year high

Dental insurance coverage among adults over the years



**Parents continue to prioritize dental coverage for their children.** Dental insurance coverage among children is on par with the prior year as nearly 9 in 10 parents (88%) indicate their children are covered.

**A growing number of adults believe dental insurance supports their overall wellness.** In fact, about 2 in 3 adult respondents (65%) currently have dental insurance, which represents a 5-year high.

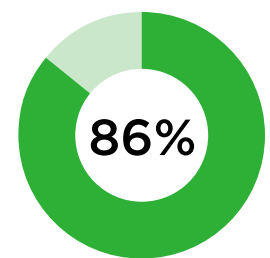
**Beyond supporting oral health, dental insurance provides financial assurance in uncertain economic times.** Nearly 9 in 10 (88%) adults indicate that dental insurance makes them less worried about dental emergencies as they believe it helps save them money in the long run (85%) and is worth the cost (84%). They understand that insurance provides pre-negotiated discounts with their dentist (80%), which is especially helpful as a growing number of adults indicate that out-of-pocket costs are a top barrier for seeking unexpected care (22% in 2024 vs. 17% in 2023).

**U.S. adults seek dental plans that cover basic preventive care.** Two free preventive cleanings are a must-have for any plan, with 63% of adults indicating they'd want this benefit as part of their coverage.

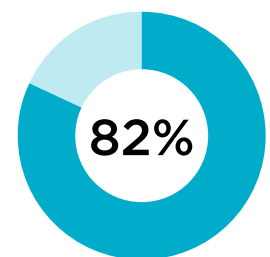
## GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Among adults, on average, Gen X and Boomers (69%) are more likely than Millennials and Gen Z (56%) to want two free preventive cleanings in their dental insurance plan.

**Adults who agree that having dental insurance is essential to protecting oral and overall health**



2024

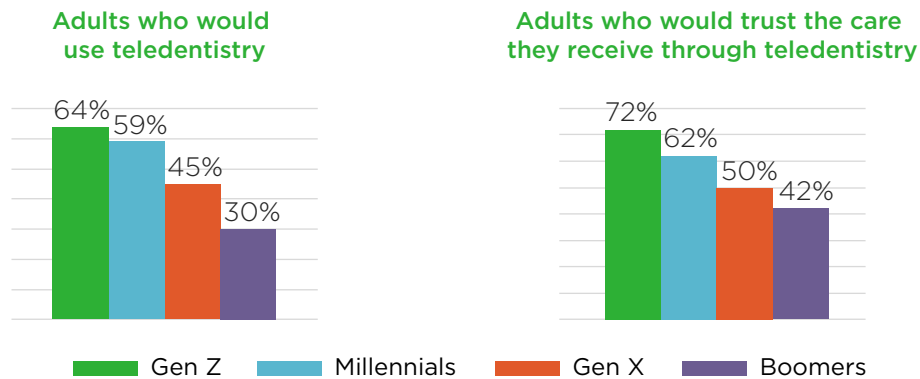


2023

**Teledentistry is gaining traction, especially with younger generations.** Nearly half of adults would use teledentistry—a digital care option where patients can receive consultations, evaluations, and advice remotely via video calls or mobile apps—when seeking oral health care (47%), and over half would trust the care they receive through this service (54%).

### GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

As digital natives, Gen Z and Millennials are more likely to engage in teledentistry compared to older generations as well as trust the care they receive through these services.



Nearly 1 in 10 (9%) adults indicate they would want teledentistry services to be included in a dental insurance plan. Gen Z (15%) and Millennials (12%) are most eager for this benefit compared to Boomers (5%).

“A considerable portion of the population, even those with dental benefits, often forego regular dental care. Teledentistry, utilizing photos, videos, and even AI, empowers people to gain a comprehensive understanding of their dental health conveniently from the comfort of their homes. This innovative approach allows people to better understand and manage their dental health, helping to improve overall well-being. Embracing teledentistry presents a significant opportunity to enhance oral health care access across geographic, social, and economic populations, including those living in underserved communities.”



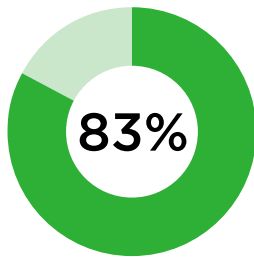
Keith Libou, DMD  
Chief Clinical Officer,  
Delta Dental of New Jersey and Connecticut



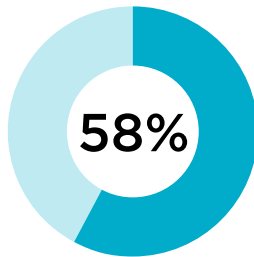
**Ultimately, the results are clear – dental insurance is important in helping people receive necessary oral care.**

In fact, adults with dental benefits were more likely to have visited the dentist in 2023 to seek preventive care than those without coverage.

#### Percentage of adults who visited the dentist in 2023



With coverage



Without coverage

**The state of oral health in 2024 is encouraging as U.S. adults and children place an emphasis on good oral care habits and prioritize preventive dental visits.** There is an improved understanding of the diligence that is required to support oral health and overall wellness from a physical, mental, and financial standpoint. Dental coverage is critical in facilitating oral health goals, and it will result in more positive overall health outcomes for all.



## About the research

Delta Dental Plans Association commissioned a third-party market research firm, Material Holdings, LLC, to undertake research that formed the basis for this report. Material conducted its research between January 3 and January 17, 2024, using an email invitation and online surveys of two audiences recruited through an opt-in panel:

- 1,000 nationally representative U.S. adults ages 18+
- 1,000 parents of children ages 12 and under

Geographic distribution quotas were set to ensure a reliable and accurate representation of the U.S. population of adults and parents with children ages 12 and under. Research in this report has a margin of error of +/- 3%.

The generational categories referred to in this report are defined by the following:

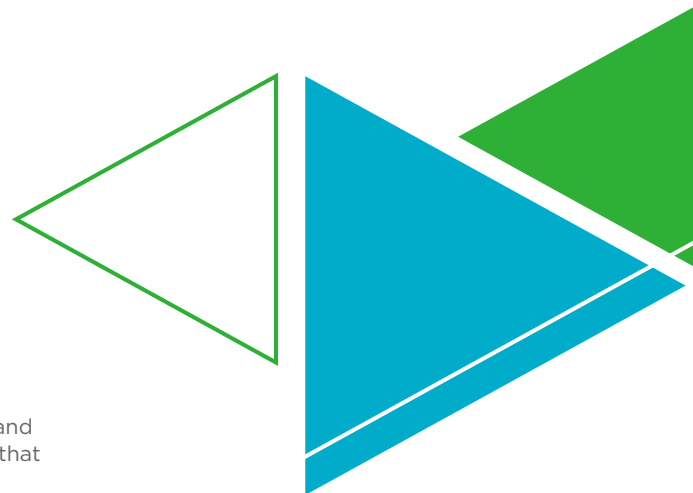
- Gen Z: individuals born between 1997 and 2005
- Millennials: individuals born between 1981 and 1996
- Gen X: individuals born between 1965 and 1980
- Boomers: individuals born between 1946 and 1964

## About Delta Dental Plans Association

Based in Chicago, Illinois, Delta Dental Plans Association is the not-for-profit national association of the 39 independent Delta Dental companies. Through these companies, Delta Dental is the nation's largest dental benefits provider and offers the country's largest dental network with approximately 152,000 participating dentists. Over the last decade, Delta Dental companies and their foundations invested over \$1.9 billion to improve the oral and overall health of our communities.

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