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## Insights gained in Hispanic survey

**Oral health information, access, insurance sought**

By Stacie Crozier, ADA News staff

*San Diego*—A new oral health survey of U.S. Hispanics shows that patients in this growing population group want more information on good oral health habits, access to affordable care and dental insurance, and more dental health care professionals who are Hispanic or who speak Spanish. Results of the national survey, led by the Hispanic Dental Association and sponsored by Procter & Gamble brands Crest and Oral-B, were released Nov. 3 during the opening ceremony of the HDA Annual Meeting in San Diego. Dr. Sarita Arteaga and Dr. Iván Lugo, both HDA past presidents, presented the findings from the survey. “It was a dream come true for us to be able to share the knowledge gained from this collaborative effort with dental professionals who are passionate about this and will work hard to begin to change perceptions,” said Dr. Lugo. “This is a first step to increase awareness and help the public at the community level with this knowledge and the tools that go with it.”

“This was wonderful,” said Dr. Arteaga. “Presenting at the HDA meeting was a very invigorating experience because it fits with HDA’s mission to educate oral health professionals, advocates and students on Hispanic oral health disparities and access to care. This is just the beginning of an initiative to address the gaps in the oral health knowledge and access to care for U.S. Hispanics.” Survey results come at a time when U.S. Census Bureau reports show that between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent, and more than half of the growth in the total population of the United States between 2000 and 2010 was due to the increase in the Hispanic population. In 2010, 37.6 million, or 75 percent, of Hispanics lived in the eight states with Hispanic populations of one million or more (California, Texas, Florida, New York, Illinois, Arizona, New Jersey and Colorado); and the Hispanic population experienced growth between 2000 and 2010 in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The survey report, titled *Hispanics Open Up About Oral Health Care*, is posted online at [www.dentalcare.com](http://www.dentalcare.com) and on the [HDA website](http://www.hda.org). A downloadable PDF version is available. Among the findings:

- Almost one-third of Hispanics (30 percent) responded that they thought cavities will go away on their own through regular toothbrushing. About half or more of respondents also had misperceptions about the importance of brushing versus flossing, whether bleeding is normal during brushing and if mouthwash provides oral health benefits beyond just freshening breath.
- Nearly half (45 percent) of Hispanics lack dental insurance and nearly one in five (18 percent) have not visited the dentist at all in the past two years, compared to 12 percent of the general population.
- About six in 10 Hispanics feel that having Spanish-speaking and Hispanic dentists/hygienists in their community would help them “a lot” in achieving and maintaining better oral health.
- While most Hispanics, as well as the general population, rated their overall oral health as excellent or good, Hispanics experience more oral health problems. Sixty-five percent of Hispanics said they experienced at least one oral health issue in the past year versus 53 percent of the general population. For more than one-third of Hispanics (36 percent), oral health problems experienced in the past year were severe enough to impact their daily activities, compared to 22 percent of the general population.
- Among Hispanic parents, many of these same knowledge gaps exist, as does the desire for more oral health information. Yet, eight in 10 Hispanic parents (82 percent) consider themselves an excellent or a good source for teaching their children about oral health habits.



**Presenters:** On hand for the presentation of the results of the Hispanic Dental Association survey are, from left, Dr. Sarita Arteaga, HDA Foundation committee member and HDA past president; Dr. Iván Lugo, professional and scientific relations and regional manager for North America and Puerto Rico at Procter & Gamble, also an HDA past president; and Veronica Sanchez, Ph.D., global scientific communication ER manager at Procter & Gamble.

Dr. Arteaga and Dr. Lugo said that a lot of the results backed up perceptions that dental professionals and other stakeholders have long suspected, but some data were surprising. “I had an ‘aha’ moment when we began to look at the statistic that 30 percent of respondents thought they could brush away cavities,” said Dr. Lugo, professional and scientific relations and regional manager for North America and Puerto Rico at Procter & Gamble and former dental director for the city of Philadelphia. “As a dental professional and someone who wants to make a difference in public health, these myths give us a picture of how much Hispanics need more oral health prevention knowledge. They not only lack good information, they also tend to pass on erroneous information to their children, friends and neighbors.”

“The overwhelming majority of survey respondents want a Spanish-speaking or Hispanic dental health provider. They want to be able to relate to them without a language barrier, but more importantly, without cultural barriers,” said Dr. Arteaga, an HDA Foundation committee member, general dentist and associate clinical professor at the University of Connecticut School of Dental Medicine. “They also have two other serious barriers to good oral health that are equally troubling—lack of oral health literacy and access to affordable care and insurance.”

Along with the survey, the HDA, Crest and Oral-B have also released a four-panel pamphlet designed to help patients assess the accuracy of their basic oral health knowledge and help them feel more comfortable raising concerns with a dental health provider. “This bilingual pamphlet allows dental professionals, churches, community centers and others a chance to begin a dialogue with patients or groups of patients about the importance of oral health,” said Dr. Arteaga. “It’s an easy-to-use tool that can serve as a starting point.” A PDF version of the pamphlet can be downloaded at [www.dentalcare.com](http://www.dentalcare.com) or [www.hdassoc.org](http://www.hdassoc.org).

The information presented in the study and the patient pamphlet is important for all dental professionals to become familiar with, said Dr. Lugo, and response by the profession needs to begin at the dental team level. “One of the first steps will be educating dental office teams about the needs of Hispanic patients,” said Dr. Lugo. “Dental professionals need to be aware of barriers—not just language barriers, but cultural and access barriers, and reach out outside the dental office to friends, family members and neighbors with oral health information that can help patients with limited oral health literacy.”

“This survey highlights the true oral health disparities that exist in our country and demonstrates the real need for intense education to improve oral health literacy,” said ADA President William Calton, who attended the HDA annual meeting. “The findings validate the need and importance of initiatives like the upcoming Ad Council public service campaign on oral health and reinforce the ADA’s recent reports on breaking down barriers to oral health.” (The reports are posted on [www.ada.org/breakingdownbarriers.aspx](http://www.ada.org/breakingdownbarriers.aspx)). Dr. C. Yolanda Bonta, HDA executive director, said the survey is groundbreaking because it gets to the heart of the issues that affect the oral health of Hispanics.

“Health care professionals and policymakers often presume to know what patients need, but until now, no one has asked the patients,” Dr. Bonta said. “I think the results show us not only that barriers exist, but some strategies to help overcome them in a way that makes patients comfortable. This information is a call to action for all dental professionals and will benefit both patients and dental practices in this changing world.”