

Dentists in Alaska:
Addendum to Understanding Alaska Research Summary No. 6
March 2007

In the initial printing of UA Research Summary No. 6, “Alaska’s \$5 Billion Health Care Bill – Who’s Paying?” (Institute of Social and Economic Research, March 2006), we cited (in Figure 16) statistics on the number of dentists per capita in Alaska from the U.S. Department of Health and Social Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), State Workforce Profile Alaska for 2000. That number—126.2 dentists per 100,000 population—was incorrect.¹

We corrected that error in later printings, and in the online version of the summary, thanks to the diligent researchers in Health Planning and Systems Development in the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services. They compared the number of dentists licensed in Alaska with the HRSA data we originally cited, and checked with the HRSA contractor who developed the data at the University of Albany to ascertain the basis of the figure. We concur with their assessment that the University of Albany used a faulty estimate that became part of the HRSA Work Force Profile for Alaska in 2000.

We regret not verifying the figure against additional sources.

We believe a more reliable data source is the American Dental Association (ADA) count of “active, non-federal dentists in private practice.” Although this data source has its own limitations—for example, it does not count federal dentists who may practice in Alaska—it appears to generally capture the number of dentists who practice in Alaska. In addition, we note that the number of active dentists in private practice does not take into account the number of hours dentists work per year.²

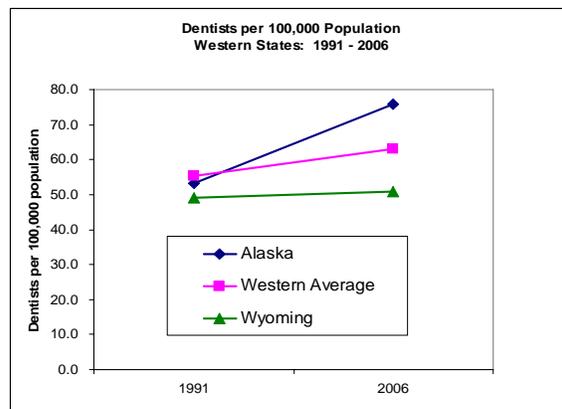
¹ See <http://bhpr.hrssa.gov/healthworkforce/reports/statesummaries/alaska.htm>

² We note that this could be a material consideration. An article by Dr. Lazar Brown in

Trends and Current Estimate

Over the period 1991 to 2006, the number of dentists per 100,000 Alaskans increased from 56.3 to 75.8.³ *On a statewide average basis*, Alaska has improved from 1,880 people per dentist to 1,319 people per dentist.⁴

Among Western States, Alaska has climbed from below average to take the top spot for most dentists per capita.



Note: We show Wyoming to include the state with the fewest dentists in the Western States, in contrast to Alaska, which now appears to have the most per capita.

the May 1998 Journal of the American Dental Association, “Workforce Trends that Influence Dental Service Capacity,” found an increase in the number of active dentists who report “part-time” status (14.2% to 23.8%) and an associated decline in the average annual number of hours in the office for the average dentist in private practice, from 1999.8 hours to 1773.5 hours for the period 1982 to 1995 for the U.S. This averages out to a loss of roughly 17 hours per dentist per year.

³ See American Dental Association (ADA), U.S. Census Population Estimates by State.

⁴ We also note that while Alaska may have a high *statewide average number of dentists per capita*, this does not imply that dentists are readily accessible throughout the state.