

# Improving Access to Dental Care in 2024–2025

Clinics and Seal-a-Smile programs supported by the Wisconsin Oral Health Program

The Wisconsin Department of Health Service's (DHS) Oral Health Program (OHP) works to promote and improve oral health care access for the benefit of all Wisconsin citizens. Part of OHP's work supports preventive and treatment programs across the state.

In fiscal year 2025 (FY25), the OHP supported three rural health clinics, and 14 safety net clinics. In this year alone, rural health and dental access clinics provided care to 52,603 patients. OHP also supported 26 school-based sealant programs known as Wisconsin Seal-A-Smile (SAS) across 58 of 72 counties. Overall, these programs reached 1,162 sites (schools and head start centers) and 87,244 students during the 2024–2025 school year.

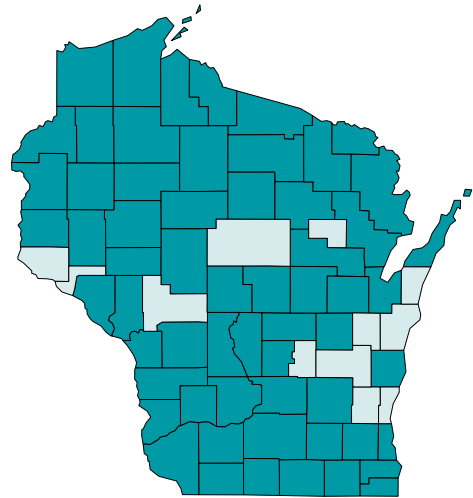
OHP awarded \$3.9 million in grants to clinics and SAS to improve dental access for 139,847 Wisconsinites. Indirectly, the benefits of this investment into Wisconsin's oral health access stretch further, from creating job opportunities to fostering healthy futures.

## OHP supported clinics

3 rural clinics

14 safety net clinics

14 counties



**139,000+**  
received care in FY 25

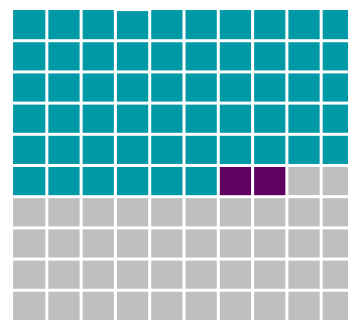


**87,000+**  
students served



**52,000+**  
patients served

## SAS school access



**56%**  
eligible  
schools  
served

**43%**  
not served

**2%** served by other  
sealant programs

*\*School access is based on SAS eligibility, which includes Wisconsin schools and head start centers with 35% or more of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.*

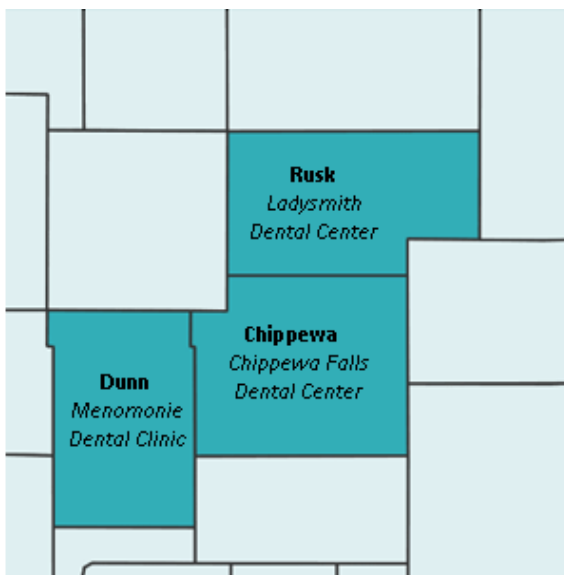
# Rural health clinics

**Funding supported three clinics and served 16,337 patients in western Wisconsin.**

Rural communities often face difficulties with dental care access due to provider shortages and longer travel distances. The OHP funded three rural health clinics in Chippewa, Dunn, and Rusk counties to improve access across western Wisconsin. A total of \$895,500 was awarded to Marshfield Family Health Clinics and applied to their Chippewa Falls, Ladysmith, and Menomonie Dental Centers.



**\$895,000**  
awarded in grants



- 1**  
**3,271** patients served at Ladysmith Dental Center
- 2**  
**7,686** patients served at Chippewa Falls Dental Center
- 3**  
**5,380** patients served at Menomonie Dental Clinic

# Safety net clinics

Certain populations experience considerable difficulty accessing dental care. To tackle this issue, the Wisconsin Oral Health Program funds 14 Safety Net Clinics across four of Wisconsin's five public health regions. In FY 2025, these clinics were awarded a total of \$1.7 million and served 36,266 patients.

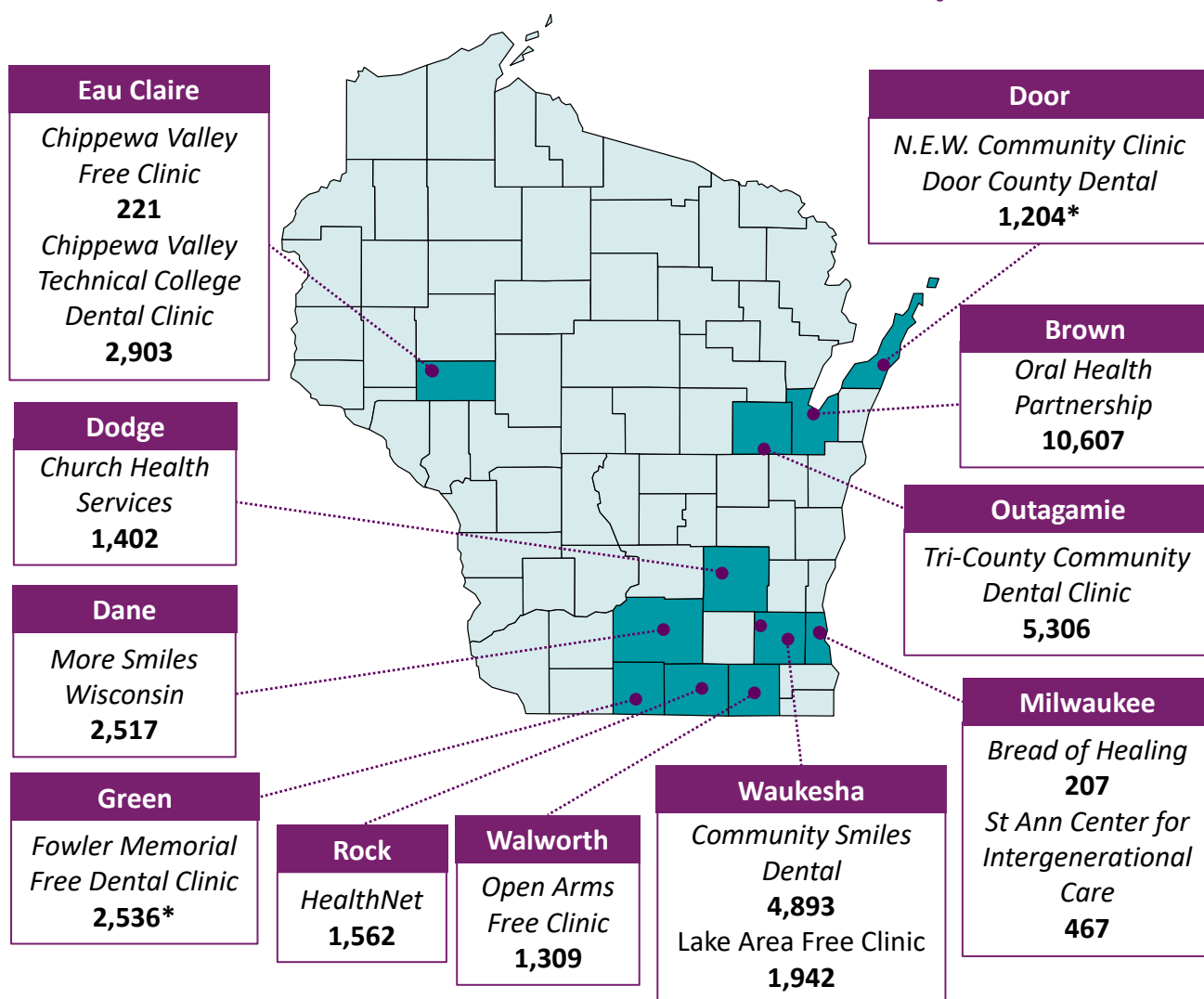


**\$1.7**  
million



**36,000+**  
patients

## Patients served at OHP funded clinics in fiscal year 2025



\*Total of unduplicated patients at mid-year

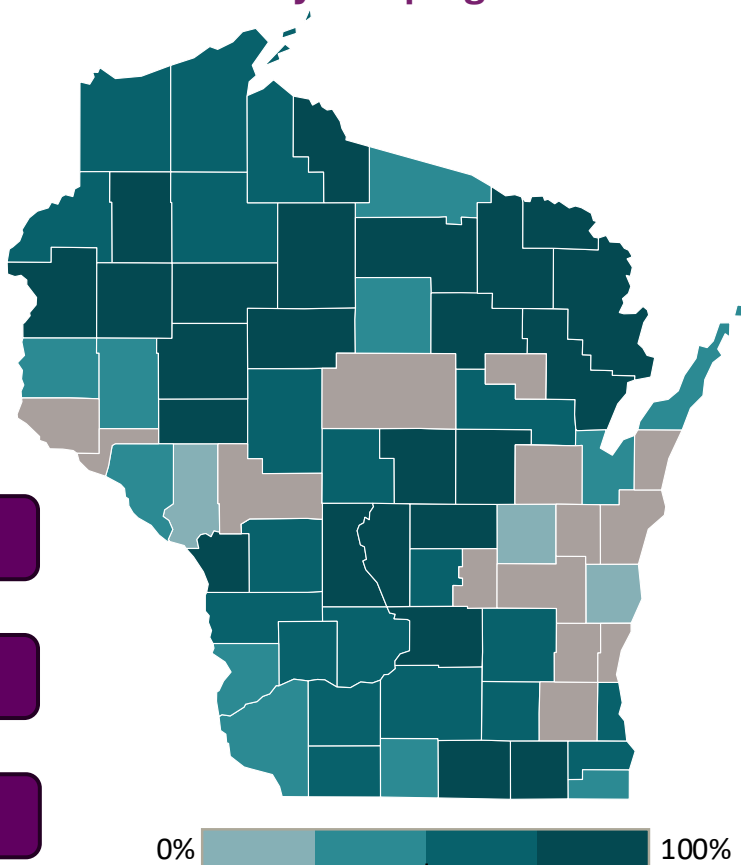
# —Wisconsin Seal-A-Smile programs—

School-based dental sealant programs are highly effective at delivering sealants to children who are less likely to receive routine dental care. Current policy stipulates that Wisconsin schools with 35% or more of students eligible for free or reduced priced meals are considered high risk and are therefore eligible to receive SAS services.

There were 26 SAS programs supported by the OHP. During the 2024-2025 school year, these programs reached **56%** of eligible, high-risk Wisconsin sites (993 out of 1,780 sites). An additional 28 high-risk sites received services through programs reporting to, but not financially supported by, the OHP.

After including these programs, 43% (759 sites) of high-risk sites are still not receiving services.

**Percent of high-risk sites served by SAS programs**



**Head start–12<sup>th</sup> grade**

**87,000+ students**

**101,611 teeth sealed**



**\$1.4 million**

total awarded in grants

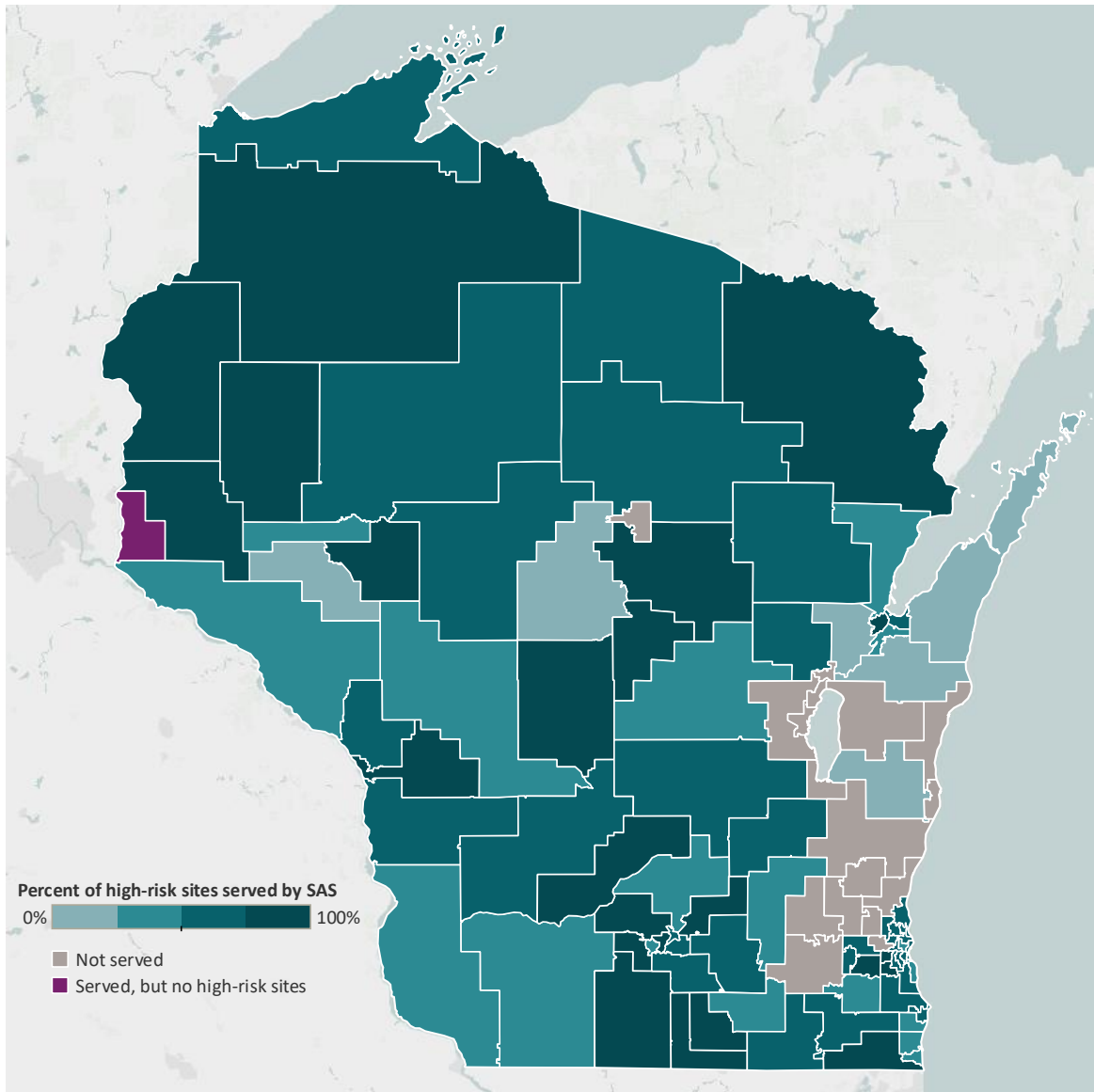


**\$17.6 million**

estimated value in preventive services

For every \$1 in Seal-A-Smile services provided, an estimated \$12.59 is saved.

# Assembly Districts served by SAS



## Percentage of WI legislative assembly districts served by SAS

Overall 83% 17% 83% Coverage

## Economic impact

In FY25, OHP awarded \$895,500 in grants to rural dental clinics to provide dental services to persons who are developmentally disabled, elderly, or who have low income. Safety net dental clinics providing care for the un- and under-insured statewide were awarded \$1.7 million in grants. Lastly, \$1.4 million in grants were awarded to school-based oral health programs that provided more than 87,000 children with preventive dental services in the 2024–2025 school year.

**\$3,995,500**

total amount of awards available and distributed in fiscal year 2025.

Rural dental clinics

**\$895.5**  
thousand

OHP awarded Marshfield Clinic this grant to provide funding for three rural dental clinics, with funds coming from state general purpose revenue (GPR).

Safety net clinics

**\$1.7**  
million

OHP awarded 14 clinics with funds coming from GPR funds.

Seal-A-Smile

**\$1.4**  
million

Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin was awarded funding for SAS, a mixture of GPR and private funds granted by Delta Dental.

Funds applied towards rural dental clinics, safety net clinics, and Seal-A-Smile are investments in Wisconsin's workforce, health care system, and communities. Grant funding both supports existing staff and creates new work opportunities. In FY25, grant funding supported 156 jobs and 11 early career or student positions. To support the dental services provided, programs contracted with local Wisconsin businesses for technology support, laundry, and cleaning services.

Increasing oral health care access in Wisconsin has far reaching benefits, ensuring healthy futures for Wisconsinites and their communities.



**156**  
jobs supported  
by OHP grants



**11**  
student or early  
career positions

# Lifelong impact

The work of the OHP to promote and improve oral health in Wisconsin ensures healthy futures for all involved; from patients to dental professionals to volunteers, the increased access to care has a lifelong impact.

## Increasing access increases productivity.

Tooth decay can lead to chronic pain and expensive restorative care. It can mean you miss time at work or school—moments you can't afford to miss. Increased dental access means being able to concentrate when it's important.

## Preventive care saves money and time in restorative care.

Early health interventions through preventive care like screenings and dental sealants save more money and time than repairing undetected or untreated decay later. Families are free to plan for the future without being set back by dental emergencies.

## Oral health access increases early detection of health issues.

Oral health works in balance with whole body health. Changes in dental hygiene can reflect other health issues. Regular oral health access increases early detection of health issues, supporting lifelong total health.

## The human connection

The increase in dental care access connects patients with providers who have a personal impact on their trust in health care. One father expressed his appreciation for dental services, "I don't know what I would do if [this clinic] was not available." Parents trust referrals from SAS programs informing them of their child's decay, and SAS programs cheer when children return with decay that has been successfully treated. One provider described their opportunity to give a special needs student their first dental exam as "very heartwarming to be the reason someone found (what was, at first, scary) their dental appointment to be fun." This care builds valuable, positive experiences for both providers and patients.



**"Not only do we make an impact in our patients' lives, but they make an impact in ours."**



**WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT**  
*of* **HEALTH SERVICES**

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