



# Identifying Caregiver Oral Health Education Needs Through a Statewide Needs Assessment Survey

## Research Project Description

**MOTIVATE: Maine's Oral Team-Based Initiative: Vital Access To Education**, an interprofessional, evidence-based, and sustainable educational model to enhance oral health care in long term care (LTC), was established to raise awareness about the connection between oral health and systemic health among older adults. Through a statewide needs assessment process, this program is being realigned for informal and family caregivers/care partners providing care to an older Mainer.

**Aim:** Identify the needs of informal caregivers and their loved ones regarding oral health care in order to develop MOTIVATE at Home, an accessible and free oral health education program emphasizing the connection between oral health and total health.

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### Background

Nationally, nearly 42 million, or one in six, Americans are unpaid caregivers/care partners, supporting a loved one over the age of 50 (AARP & National Alliance for Caregiving, 2020). Most older adults in Maine reside in their own homes and communities and a significant portion receives care and support from a family member.

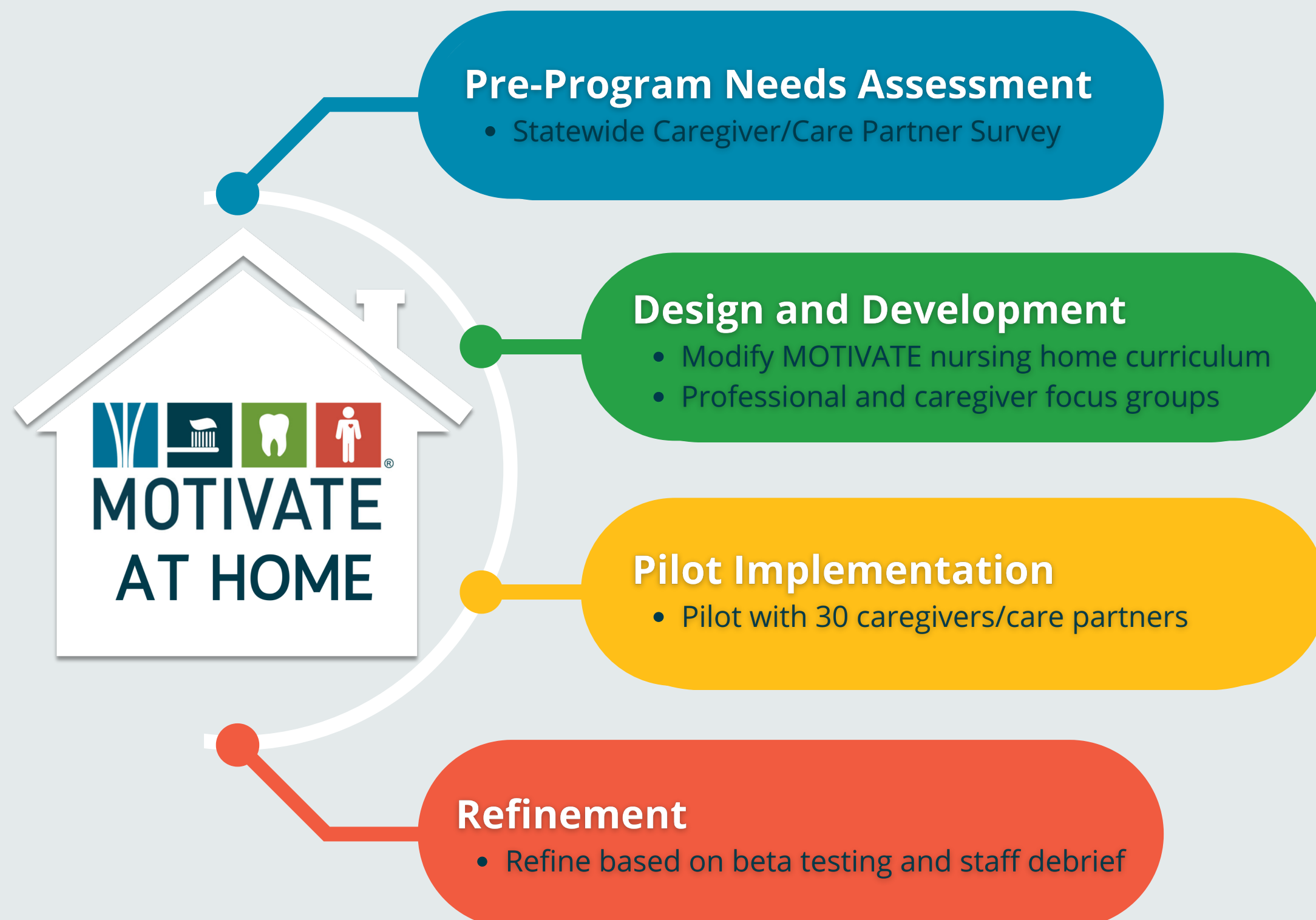
Yet, there is little accessible education to help these informal caregivers provide proper oral health care to loved ones.

A statewide survey of informal caregivers of older adults in Maine was conducted to identify oral health training needs among this population and inform the development of the MOTIVATE at Home program, which will provide free education to informal caregivers of older adults.

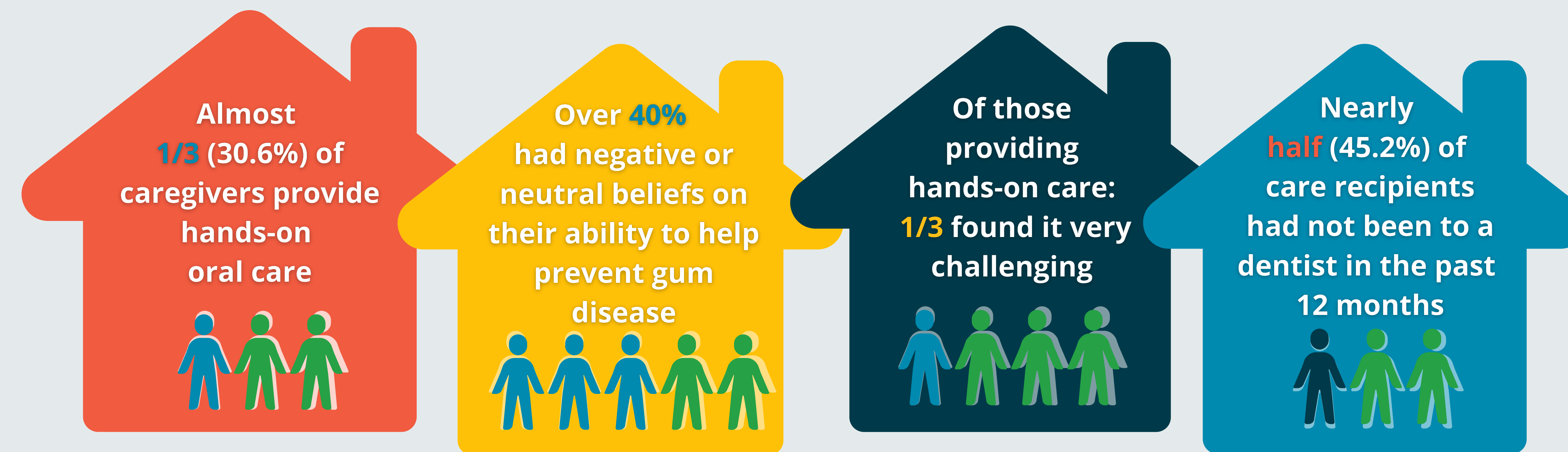
The goal of MOTIVATE at Home is to improve the oral health care status of older adults by:

- ✓ Increasing care partner knowledge of basic oral health hygiene
- ✓ Increasing confidence in having oral health conversations with healthcare providers
- ✓ Connecting care partners with local oral health-related resources

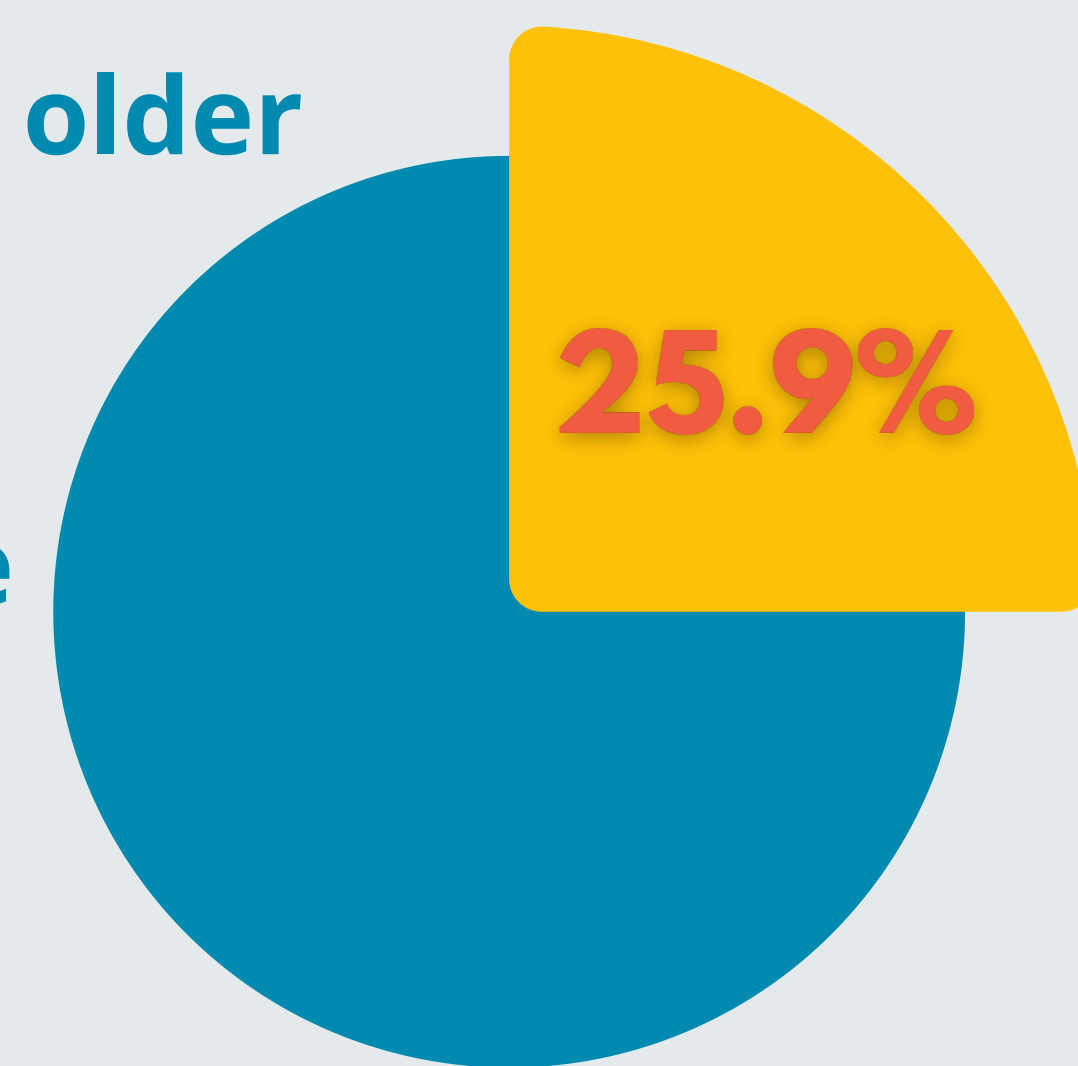
### Program Development



### Results



A quarter of older adult care recipients did not have a regular dentist.



The top reasons were:

- They had dentures and didn't see the need
- They seldom or never need dental care
- Cannot afford care/lack of insurance coverage
- Fear, apprehension, or dislike of going to a dentist
- Did not know where to go

#### % Training Topics of Interest (N=117)

- 47.0% ➤ How do drugs affect oral health?
- 44.4% ➤ How to uncover problems the person I care for doesn't tell me about
- 44.4% ➤ What are some quick fixes for oral health problems?
- 40.2% ➤ When to wait, when to worry/when to call a dentist or specialist
- 35.0% ➤ How to address challenging behavior when I give oral care
- 31.6% ➤ What causes dry mouth and decay?
- 31.6% ➤ What does bad breath mean?
- 30.8% ➤ How to clean teeth/dentures
- 29.1% ➤ How do food choices and diet affect oral health?
- 29.1% ➤ What causes mouth and gum infections?
- 22.2% ➤ How to teach the person I care for about their oral health
- 18.8% ➤ What is gum disease?
- 16.2% ➤ What causes mouth pain?
- 15.4% ➤ Why is oral health care important?
- 12.0% ➤ How to fit oral health care into the daily routine
- 9.4% ➤ What is a cavity?
- 7.7% ➤ Other: Denture coverage, minimum care, flossing fragile teeth

#### Respondent Characteristics

	n	%
<b>Gender (N=128)</b>		
Male	18	14.1
Female	109	85.1
Another gender	1	.80
<b>Race (N=125)</b>		
White	122	97.6
Black/African American	1	0.8
Asian	0	0
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.8
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0
Other	1	0.8
<b>Age</b>		
Caregiver/care partner mean age (N=125)	61.46	
Care recipient mean age (N=128)	79.95	
<b>Education Level (N=127)</b>		
Some high school or less (no diploma)	2	1.6
High school graduate or GED	18	14.2
Some college or technical school	24	18.9
Associate's degree	15	11.8
Bachelor's degree or higher	68	53.5
<b>Care Recipient Living Arrangement (N=126)</b>		
Their own home or apartment	85	67.4
Relative's home/in caregiver home	33	26.2
Community-based group residence	2	1.6
Nursing home, assisted living, long-term care	6	4.8

### Methods

Using the MOTIVATE curriculum as a base for the MOTIVATE at Home program, a needs assessment was conducted with caregivers of Maine's older adults to explore 1) Oral health care gaps faced by caregivers/care partners of older Mainers; 2) Oral health training needs; 3) Preferred learning strategies for caregivers/care partners

The final needs assessment survey consisted of 58 questions divided into the following sections:

- Oral health knowledge and attitudes,
- Oral health care access and beliefs about oral health care,
- Education and training preferences, and
- Caregiver and partner in care demographics.

Online and paper surveys were distributed statewide through collaborations with the area agencies on aging, the Alzheimer's Association, a community health worker network, and two university registries. 135 surveys were collected from March to August, 2022. Descriptive analyses and between-groups t-testing was carried out on the resulting data using SPSS version 27.

### Conclusion & Implications

There are significant gaps in dental care access for homebound and dependent older adults along with opportunities to educate caregivers and equip them with the tools needed to support oral health care for this critical population. The following principles of caregiver/care partner oral health education have been distilled from survey findings:

- Emphasize the importance of having a regular dentist and regular oral health visits and the connection between oral health and overall health
- Increase access to oral health resources and provide resources and education to make oral healthcare affordable
- Oral health education should focus on strengthening care partner understanding of their role in oral health
- Give care partners the tools needed to have conversations with a range of health and oral health providers

In order to address access gaps for older adult partners in care, education should address:

- Easing anxiety about going to the dentist
- Address the myth that those with dentures don't need to go to the dentist

And should offer...

- A variety of formats for learning: handouts, podcasts, short videos, etc.
- Content at a high school or lower level of comprehension
- Flexible online self-paced modalities to serve learner needs
- In-person meetings & discussions for those wanting to connect with other care partners
- Accessible educational design and delivery
- Content in the caregiving context: many who care for an individual living independently with memory loss, providing their own daily oral health care independently

I try to brush my spouse's teeth but he says that hurts and he would rather do it himself. Instructions on how to brush someone else's teeth would be helpful.

Read the Full Report



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