



**CONNECTICUT  
DENTAL**  
HEALTH PARTNERSHIP  
the dental plan for  
**HUSKY Health**



# 2023 Appointment Availability REPORT

The Connecticut Dental Health Partnership is the Dental Plan for HUSKY Health and is administered by BeneCare Dental Plans under a contract with the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS).

*Our mission is to enable all HUSKY Health members to achieve and maintain good oral health. We work to ensure all members have equitable access to oral health services.*

**JUNE 2023  
CTDHP.ORG**

## 2023 CTDHP Appointment Availability Survey Results

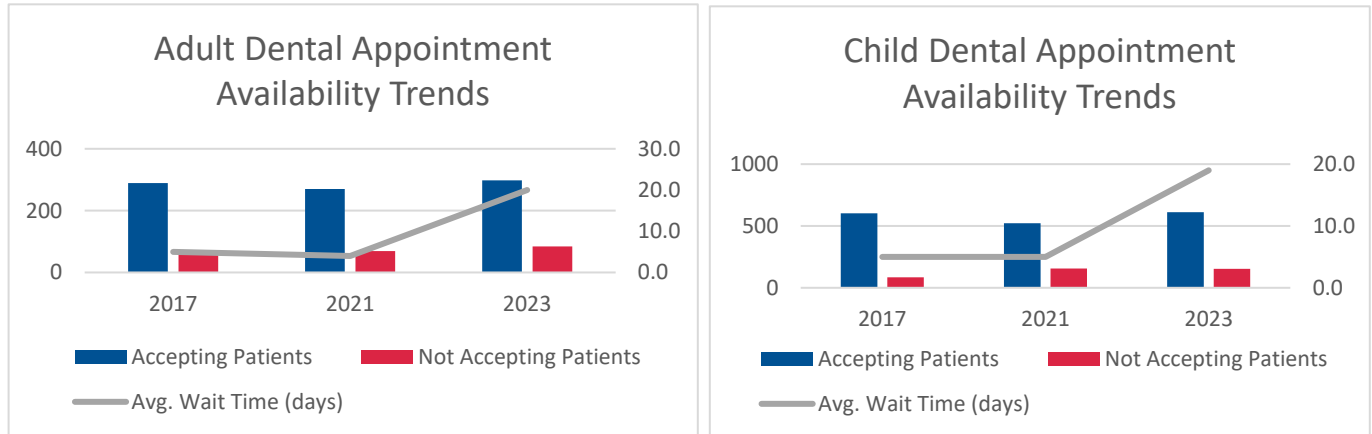
The Connecticut Dental Health Partnership (CTDHP) conducts periodic appointment availability surveys of dental practitioners participating in the dental plan for HUSKY Health. Historically those surveys were conducted bi-annually, but were suspended during the height of the COVID-19 public health emergency due to the impacts that the pandemic had on dental practice requirements for patient safety, scheduling of appointments, mandatory dental office closures and reductions in dental office staffing and patient capacity.

CTDHP's appointment availability surveys were reinstated in early in 2021 and have been conducted again in 2023 to gauge current dental appointment availability for HUSKY Health members. Surveys are conducted by an external vendor who contacts each dental office location to separately measure existing patient and new patient appointment availability for adults and children. The surveys are done across all dental specialties.

The results of the 2023 appointment availability survey reveal that dental appointment wait times for children (ages 0 through 20) have increased but remain with expected norms. Appointment wait times for adults (age 21 and over) have increased significantly. The number of dental office locations that report that they are not currently accepting HUSKY Health member-patients, or who are not accepting new HUSKY Health member-patients, has also increased.



## Adult and Children’s Dental Appointment Availability Trends:



The increase in dental appointment wait times uncovered by the 2023 survey appears to be consistent with national trends tied to dental office workforce shortages, dental office patient capacity constraints and dental office economic factors that are impacting dental practices broadly.<sup>1</sup> Dental appointment availability for HUSKY Health member-patients appears to have been impacted more adversely than national and general population trends would suggest.

Dental offices are facing continued workforce shortages resulting from many licensed oral health professionals and ancillary staff leaving the industry during the pandemic; disproportionately high inflationary pressure on dental materials, supplies and equipment; increased labor costs as dentists compete for ancillary staff; an ongoing limitation on the numbers of overlapping patient appointments in offices and waiting rooms; and pent up demand for dental services compared to pre-pandemic levels all putting pressure on appointment availability.

These constraints are compelling dental offices to carefully prioritize available appointments toward maximizing practice revenues. This results in longer wait times for patients covered by third-party payer programs (vs self-paying patients charged the offices full fees) which are further stratified by the relative value of the reimbursements available to the dental office. There is little incentive for dental offices to prioritize appointments for patients covered under deeply discounted (low reimbursing) fee schedules or under programs that rely on pre-paid capitation lest they risk providing services to those patients at a net loss.

<sup>1</sup> [Economic Outlook and Emerging Issues in Dentistry main report May 2023 \(ada.org\)](#)

Thus, appointment availability varies widely from dental practice to dental practice, largely as a function of the demographic makeup of each practice’s patient base. Those offices with predominantly HUSKY Health member-patients appear to have shorter wait times, which is expected given the general trend toward lower demand for dental service among adults. Conversely, those practices with a broad mix of

self-paying patients and patients covered under a variety of third-party payer programs appear to have generally longer appointment wait times.

There also appear to be geographic variances in appointment availability among dental offices, with the stark differences between rural, urban core and urban periphery areas. New patient appointment availability for children varies from 13 days in Fairfield County to 38 days in New London and Litchfield Counties. For adults, new patient appointment availability varies from 14 days in Fairfield County to 40 days in New London County.

**New and Existing Patient Appointment Availability for Adults and Children by County**

<b>ADULT - Next Appointment for new patient</b>	
<b>County</b>	<b>Days</b>
Fairfield	14
Hartford	22
Litchfield	28
Middlesex	25
New Haven	14
New London	40
Tolland	32
Windham	38
<b>Average</b>	<b>20</b>

<b>CHILDREN - Next Appointment for new patient</b>	
<b>County</b>	<b>Days</b>
Fairfield	13
Hartford	18
Litchfield	38
Middlesex	22
New Haven	18
New London	38
Tolland	41
Windham	32
<b>Average</b>	<b>19</b>

<b>ADULT - Next Appointment for existing patient</b>	
<b>County</b>	<b>Days</b>
Fairfield	24
Hartford	32
Litchfield	18
Middlesex	48
New Haven	18
New London	37
Tolland	32
Windham	46
<b>Average</b>	<b>27</b>

<b>CHILDREN - Next Appointment for existing patient</b>	
<b>County</b>	<b>Days</b>
Fairfield	15
Hartford	26
Litchfield	33
Middlesex	22
New Haven	22
New London	46
Tolland	41
Windham	61
<b>Average</b>	<b>24</b>

Certain dental specialties also exhibit longer appointment wait times. With few endodontists participating in the dental plan for HUSKY Health, their capacity to provide timely appointments for the member population is severely strained.

Other specialties, such as orthodontists, show very short appointment wait times, suggesting that those dental offices have unused capacity which may be reflective of post-pandemic consumer demand for cosmetic dental services continuing to decline.

New Patient Appointment Average Availability	
Specialty	Availability (Days)
Ortho	15
Pediatric	18
General Child	19
General Adult	20
Endodontist - Child	24
Oral Surgeons - Child	28
Endodontist - Adult	34
Oral Surgeons - Adult	46

In State Fiscal Year 2022, Connecticut increased the Medicaid adult dental fee schedule by 25%. This increase raised the adult dental fee schedule from 53% of the children’s fee schedule to 34% of the children’s fee schedule. While the fee schedule increase may have been expected to provide an economic incentive for dental offices to provide more timely appointments to adult HUSKY Health members, it appears that lingering effects from the pandemic, inflationary pressures, and workforce and staffing issues have more than offset any incentive that the fee schedule increase may have created.

Dentists have reacted to these economic factors by increasing their usual and customary charges at seemingly higher rates than they have historically. The children’s HUSKY Health dental fee schedule now covers only 47.95% of median CT dentists’ charges. The adult HUSKY Health dental fee schedule now covers just 30.18% of median CT dentists’ charges. Reimbursement rate relativity appears to be influencing appointment availability where dentists are only making appointments available to patients covered by relatively low reimbursing third party payer programs when they cannot fill those appointments at all. Some dentists appear to have concluded that an empty chair is preferable to one filled with a patient whose dental services will result in a loss to the dentist.

While dental offices are not yet terminating their participation in HUSKY Health in large numbers, and both geographic accessibility and capacity (the ratio of members to dentists) in the CTDHP/HUSKY Health dental network remain robust, there appear to be long term trends in diminished appointment availability that continues impede members’ timely access to dental care, especially for adult HUSKY Health members. Should these economic and workforce conditions continue without further adjustments to the HUSKY Health dental rates, there may be significant attrition in the CTDHP/HUSKY Health dental network which would put additional pressures on dental appointment availability for both HUSKY Health children and adults.

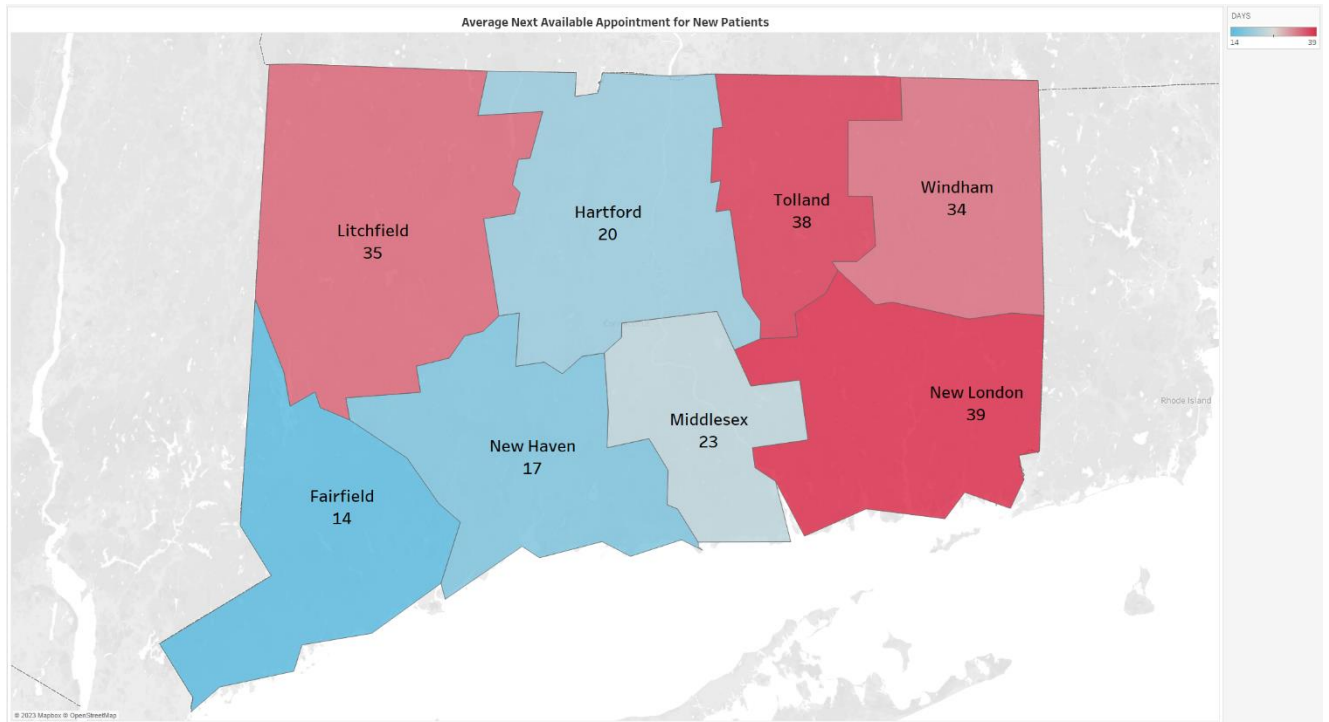
## Summary

- Dental appointment wait times for children (ages 0 through 20) have increased but remain with expected norms.
- Dental appointment wait times for adults (age 21 and over) have increased significantly.
- There geographic variances in appointment availability among dental offices, with the stark differences between rural, urban core and urban periphery areas.

- The number of dental office locations that report that they are not currently accepting HUSKY Health member-patients, or who are not accepting new HUSKY Health member-patients, has also increased.

## Appendix

### Heat Map of Average Days for an Appointment for a New Patient by County



Fairfield County	14 days
New Haven County	17 days
Hartford County	20 days
Middlesex County	23 days
Windham County	34 days
Litchfield County	35 days
Tolland County	38 days
New London County	39 days

**TOP 25 ZIP CODES by POPULATION**

<b>ZIP</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>Average New Patient Days to Appointment</b>	<b>Average Existing Patient Days to Appointment</b>
06360	NORWICH	64	59
06511	NEW HAVEN	39	74
06053	NEW BRITAIN	30	30
06708	WATERBURY	30	33
06810	DANBURY	28	24
06790	TORRINGTON	27	27
06108	EAST HARTFORD	23	23
06112	HARTFORD	21	21
06516	WEST HAVEN	21	38
06605	BRIDGEPORT	19	24
06320	NEW LONDON	18	18
06705	WATERBURY	15	17
06010	BRISTOL	14	32
06106	HARTFORD	13	13
06513	NEW HAVEN	13	10
06902	STAMFORD	13	16
06457	MIDDLETOWN	12	12
06051	NEW BRITAIN	12	12
06114	HARTFORD	10	10
06450	NEW BRITAIN	8	8
06450	MERIDEN	8	7
06513	EAST HAVEN	7	30
06610	BRIDGEPORT	6	4
06604	BRIDGEPORT	4	5
06606	BRIDGEPORT	4	2
06040	MANCHESTER	4	14
06704	WATERBURY	1	1