

THE LINK



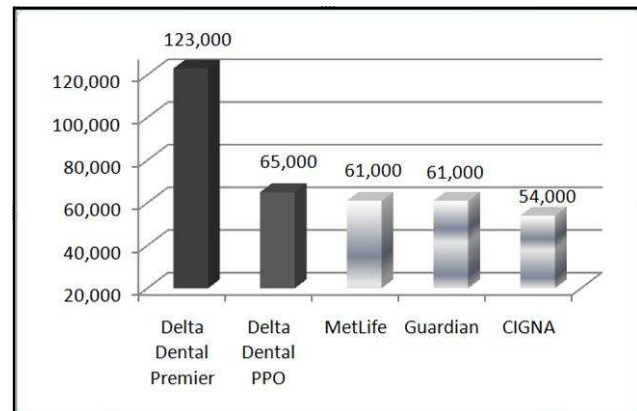
The Link is a monthly newsletter published by Delta Dental of New Mexico about the role of dental insurance, and the link between oral health and overall health. Since it includes oral health news, industry news, and Delta Dental updates, it's also our link to you.

Network Size – What’s Behind the Numbers

When it comes to dental network size, it’s important to understand what’s behind the numbers. How network size is calculated and how frequently the numbers are updated can make a big difference in the overall satisfaction of the enrollees who seek services from in-network dentists.

Most important is the total number of individual dentists in a network, also referred to as the number of *unique participating providers*. This is considered the true measuring stick for sheer network size and access because the more dentists in a network, the greater the opportunity for enrollees to find in-network care where and when they need it.

Some dental carriers boost network numbers by counting every dentist in every clinic within a chain of dental clinics, regardless of whether or not each dentist practices at every location. Delta Dental counts only locations where Delta Dental participating dentists actually practice.



Sometimes carriers recruit dentists specifically to serve a few large, important groups. The discounts negotiated with these dentists (which are typically very low) only work for enrollees with these select big groups and not for the rest of the carrier’s enrollees, yet those dentists are sometimes still counted as participating providers in the final network numbers.

Delta Dental networks are locally developed and controlled exclusively by its member companies. To ensure the integrity of Delta Dental network numbers Delta Dental of New Mexico updates network numbers each week to reflect dentists who have retired, reduced their workloads to fewer office locations or otherwise changed their network status. When carrier to carrier comparisons are made, Delta Dental uses a third-party resource to compile participating provider data and scrub the data for duplicates within Delta Dental and other dental benefits carriers’ networks. All of these steps ensure the validity and credibility of the network numbers reported by Delta Dental of New Mexico.

It’s a fact ... more dentists participate with Delta Dental!

Consider a New Year's Resolution That Will Help Improve Oral Health

It may seem simple, but an effective oral health resolution can involve just a toothbrush, dental floss and sugar-free gum.

Long-term, eating foods that are high in sugar, without proper oral care, could result in tooth decay and cavities. If not removed by brushing or other means, sugars in the mouth can contribute to tooth decay.

Naturally occurring bacteria in the mouth form a colorless, sticky film called plaque. Cavity-causing organisms within plaque feed on sugar and turn it into acid, which attacks tooth enamel and leads to tooth decay. But proper brushing, flossing and chewing sugar-free gum are easy ways to fight tooth decay.

- **A Toothbrush** - Brushing your teeth with fluoride toothpaste is an effective strategy. Removing plaque at least twice per day will help prevent tooth decay and gum disease. Choose a toothbrush with a soft, rounded-end nylon bristle brush. An alternative to the conventional toothbrush is the electric toothbrush, which some argue, is more effective at removing plaque. Electric toothbrushes come with vibrating, oscillating or sonic brush heads, and the basic models are relatively inexpensive.
- **Dental Floss** - While a toothbrush is effective in cleaning tooth surfaces, the bristles cannot adequately clean between the teeth. Dental floss helps remove plaque from these hard-to-reach areas. There are many types of dental floss to choose from – unwaxed or waxed, flavored or unflavored and regular or wide. Waxed floss may be easier to slide through tight teeth or restoration contacts, while unwaxed floss will spread out its fibers during use for greater tooth contact. Improve the chances that the floss you buy as part of that new year's resolution will actually be used by choosing a flavored floss – like cinnamon.
- **Sugar-Free Gum** - Many studies have shown that chewing sugar-free gum after meals and snacks, especially when brushing at those times is impractical, helps reduce the acid level in the mouth which has a potentially detrimental effect on tooth enamel. *Choose gum that includes xylitol*, an artificial sweetener believed to reduce the incidence of cavities.

Teeth Talk

Plaque—Teeth are covered with a sticky film of bacteria called plaque. Following a meal or snack, the bacteria release acids that attack tooth enamel. Repeated attacks can cause the enamel to break down, eventually resulting in cavities.

Tartar—Plaque that is not removed with thorough daily brushing and cleaning between teeth can eventually harden into calculus or tartar.

Quick Facts from a Recent Study

Consumers are aware of the link between oral health and their overall health status, and consider dental benefits to be a very important part of the essential benefits package. They want their dental insurance to be easy to use, allow them to use their personal dentist, and include several coverage options of which the most important is preventive care such as cleanings and X-rays.

Poor oral health increases employees' time away from their jobs, which can have a negative impact on a business's bottom line. Among adults, more than 164 million work hours are lost each year because of dental problems.

Dental benefits costs remain moderate with just 6 cents of each private insurance dollar spent on dental services.

Every \$1 spent on prevention saves \$4 in treatment.

Preventive care, early detection and treatment that dental benefits encourage save the U.S. and employers \$4 billion annually.