

# PUBLICLY FINANCED DENTAL SERVICES IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: ORAL EXAMINATIONS USER PROFILE

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## INTRODUCTION

Recent improvements in Irish oral health, together with Ireland's ageing and growing population, have highlighted the need to reform dental services. A new National Oral Health policy (NOHP), "Smile agus Sláinte" was introduced by the Department of Health in 2019 to address these challenges. The development of a national database of oral healthcare measures is a key part of the new NOHP. This article describes how data from the HSE National Dental Record and Information System (NDRIS), combined with data from existing sources, has allowed us to develop an age-specific profile of those availing of publicly financed oral examinations. The analysis provides the most complete picture to date of those availing of publicly financed dental services in the Republic of Ireland.

## DATA AND METHODS

Data from the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS) obtained from NDRIS, the Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme (DTBS) and HSE Public Dental Service (PDS) were combined to develop a comprehensive utilisation profile for publicly financed oral examinations in 2018. Age-specific oral examination rates per 1,000 population were calculated by applying ESRI population estimates.

## FINDINGS

Age-specific oral examination rates in 2018 were lowest among the 0-15 and 16-24 years age groups (152.7 and 136.7 per 1,000 population, respectively) (Figure 1). The rate increased with age, peaking overall for those aged 45-54 years before a notable decrease was observed in the 75+ years age group. As can also be seen in Figure 1, as individuals age, DTSS-financed oral examinations accounted for a larger share of total utilisation. This likely reflects changing age-based eligibility for different schemes.

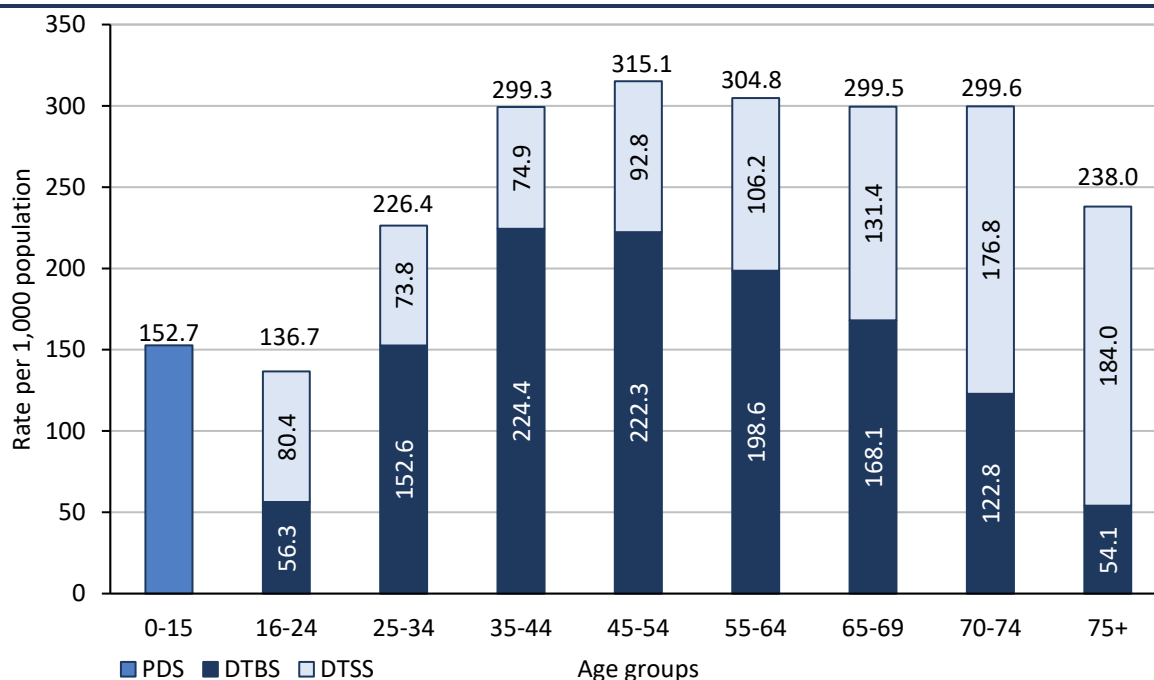
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<sup>1</sup> This Bulletin summarises the findings from: Henry, E. Brick, A. and Keegan, C. "A utilisation profile of publicly financed oral examinations in the Republic of Ireland", Community Dental Health, online June 11 2021. DOI: [http://dx.org/10.1922/CDH\\_00382Henry05](http://dx.org/10.1922/CDH_00382Henry05). This work was supported by the ESRI Research Programme in Healthcare Reform funded by the Department of Health.

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**FIGURE 1** Publicly financed oral examinations per 1,000 population, 2018



*Note:* DTBS indicates Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme; DTSS, Dental Treatment Services Scheme; PDS, Public Dental Service  
*Source:* Henry et al. (2021). A utilisation profile of publicly financed oral examinations in the Republic of Ireland.

**DISCUSSION**

This analysis highlights relatively low oral examination rates among 0-15, 16-24 and 75+ years age groups. These findings suggest low levels of general service utilisation in these age groups and are consistent with concerns raised by the NOHP over gaps in the provision of publicly financed oral healthcare services to a significant portion of the population. While the proposed changes to services aimed at redressing these gaps appear appropriate, ongoing evaluation of their impact will be essential in assessing the extent to which they achieve their primary goal of allowing each individual to achieve their personal best oral health.

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