



## Definition of Dental Underserved Areas

### Overview and Background Facts:

Underserved areas exist in both inner city locations or in rural areas of Illinois. The state and federal government can designate an Illinois county as a Dental Health Professions Shortage Area (HPSA) based on the lack of dentists to the overall population (1:5,000) of a given county or based on a “special population” ratio, usually Medicaid population of (1:4,000). Currently Illinois has 44 counties designated as a Dental HPSA because of Medicaid access and 2 counties for lack of dentists to the general population.

Of the 2,966 census tracts in Illinois, 1,166 tracts (39%) have at least 30% of their population living below 200% of the federal poverty level.

Of the 1,907 Illinois townships, 619 (32%) have at least 30% of their population living below 200% of the federal poverty level.

The Illinois General Assembly has established the Joint Task Force on Rural Health to research ways to channel health care services to rural underserved areas of Illinois.

### Comments:

Dental underserved areas are best defined by looking at service areas that the community has historically adopted for the purchase of major consumer goods and services. It is not uncommon to cross county or state boundaries to go to the regional metropolitan community for purchasing health care services or other major items such as automobiles, home appliances or specialty clothing.

Political boundaries, especially census tracts and townships, do not provide accurate information, as dentists could be located across the street, but in a different political area.

### ISDS Position Statement:

The use of geographic service areas is the most realistic way to determine what is truly an underserved area. Designated underserved areas that use political boundaries such as census tracts, county and state boundaries are not realistic as they do not reflect actual purchasing patterns of the local residents.