

Press Release

Taub Center: Average family expenditure for dental health is about NIS 175 per month, which is 1.5% of the overall family expenditure on consumer goods – but only one-quarter of households report that they actually spend money on dental care. In other words, the real average expenditure of households is some NIS 540 or 6.4% of their overall expenditure. An expenditure of this amount is an impossible drain on the income of the lower quintile, families with children and elderly families, who must forego dental health care or alternatively, some other essential expenditure.

A new study by the **Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel** finds that the average family expenditure for dental health care is about NIS 175 per month, which is 1.5% of the expenditure on consumer items. In a survey conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics, only one-quarter of families reported that they actually spend money on dental care – thus the actual per household expenditure is some NIS 540 per month or 6.4% of overall consumer expenditure. The total annual expenditure on private dental care is about NIS 4.5 billion.

The study on dental health, “The Burden on Households and Implications for National Health Insurance,” was written by **Dr. Guy Navon** and **Prof. Dov Chernichovsky**, the chair of the Health Policy Program at the Taub Center and a professor at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

The expenditure on routine dental care (fillings, extractions, etc.) is most common amongst families with children and young adults who for the most part do not have supplementary health insurance that includes dental care. This expense – for those who reported it – reaches on average NIS 530 per month which is about 6.0% of the total household expenditure. The study shows that when a family has to finance such routine treatments, the amounts are similar for all income quintiles. The lower income quintiles, who cannot afford expenses of this order, are often forced to forego treatment, in most cases treatment for children.

The study also found that the expense for oral and maxillofacial surgeries involving reconstruction is most common in families with adults over 45-years-old, who tend to have supplementary insurance that includes private dental insurance. The expenditure in this case is much higher and can reach an average of NIS 2,000 per month, which is 18.0% of total reported household monthly expenditure. This expense is considered “catastrophic” and often involves foregoing some other significant need. Due to this, reporting of this type of expense is particularly low in the lower two income quintiles.

Dental health insurance in Israel is reportedly held by only 6.7% of households – a relatively low rate by international Western standards.

The study further shows that dental health care expenditure is clearly regressive; the rate of expenditure relative to income declines with increased income. In addition, dental care insurance contributes to a rise in inequality or disparities since those with relatively higher salaries are also those who hold dental insurance. As a result, accessibility to services is higher for those with higher incomes whose income is, in fact, protected from extraordinary expenses.

The recommendations of the study are as follows:

- A. To have full implementation of the law regarding dental care service to school children.
- B. To ensure basic dental care – including a preventive component – for every household in Israel. Complete removal of the burden from households would require NIS 3.3 billion annually – 5% of the national expenditure on medical services.
- C. To assist those requiring dental surgical procedures for reconstruction according to set criteria with special emphasis on the elderly and those with low incomes.

In conclusion, the researchers recommend implementation of the government decision to include dental health in National Health Insurance as was most recently recommended by the Deputy Minister of Health and the government.

The Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel, headed by **Prof. Dan Ben-David**, is an independent, non-partisan, socio-economic research institute based in Jerusalem. The Center provides decision makers and the public at large with a big-picture perspective in the areas of the economy and society. The interdisciplinary policy programs include outstanding researchers from academia and leading experts from policy fields who, along with the Center's professional staff, conduct research and make policy recommendations on key socio-economic policy issues facing the country.

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