

Emergency Department Visits for Toothaches

Management and Cost of Toothaches to the Health Care System

In Alberta, visits to the emergency department (ED) for toothaches are common. From 2007 to 2013, there were approximately 37,000 ED visits for toothaches with no interventions. This means the ED physicians did nothing other than consult and manage pain, possibly by advising patients to take painkillers and prescribe over-the-counter medication.

Each ED visit is estimated to cost the health care system approximately \$150-225 dollars. For comparative purposes, a visit to the local dentist to perform a restorative procedure using the bonded technique and tooth coloration for 2 sides is \$146 dollars (Alberta Blue Cross Dental Fee Schedule - 2014, claim code 23112).

Ideally, dental insurance plans would cover such expenses. However, not all Albertans have dental insurance and we assume this would increase the likelihood of people using the ED when dental issues become serious.

Emergency Department visits highest among Albertans living in the lowest income areas

Combining ED visits from 2007 to 2013, Albertans residing in the lowest income areas (Q1) are the most likely to use the ED for toothaches. The resulting age-standardized rate for both male and female is approximately 13 visits per 1,000 within the seven year timeframe (2007-2013).

Today's graph reveals the impact income has on utilizations of ED services for dental problems. As income increases, the likelihood of people using the ED for toothaches decreases accordingly. People in the lowest income group are twice as likely as the highest income group to visit an ED for toothaches (13 visits per 1,000 vs. 6.2 visits per 1,000).

