

Background

Oral and dental health are important parts of a Medicare beneficiary's overall wellbeing. Traditional fee-for-service (FFS) Medicare does not offer dental benefits, but many Medicare Advantage (MA) and supplemental private plans provide dental coverage. Self-reported data from Medicare beneficiaries can improve our understanding of their experiences with oral health issues, preventive oral health behaviors, and access to dental care.

Methods

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), with NORC at the University of Chicago, conducts the Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS) annually. The MCBS employs a stratified random sampling design that produces a nationally representative sample of Medicare beneficiaries. Respondents enroll in rotating panels, and they or their proxies are interviewed three times per year for four years. Although the data have typically been collected in person, the MCBS used telephone surveys in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data

Among the questions asked in the MCBS are items about disability, oral health, and access to health care. The analysis here used data from the 2020 MCBS Survey File. The sample included 13,913 beneficiaries, whose responses were weighted to reflect a target population of 59.7 million community-dwelling Medicare beneficiaries. Beneficiaries who resided in a facility were not included in this analysis.

All data was self-reported.

Results

Oral health issues

Fig. 1: Beneficiary had trouble eating solid food due to mouth or teeth problems

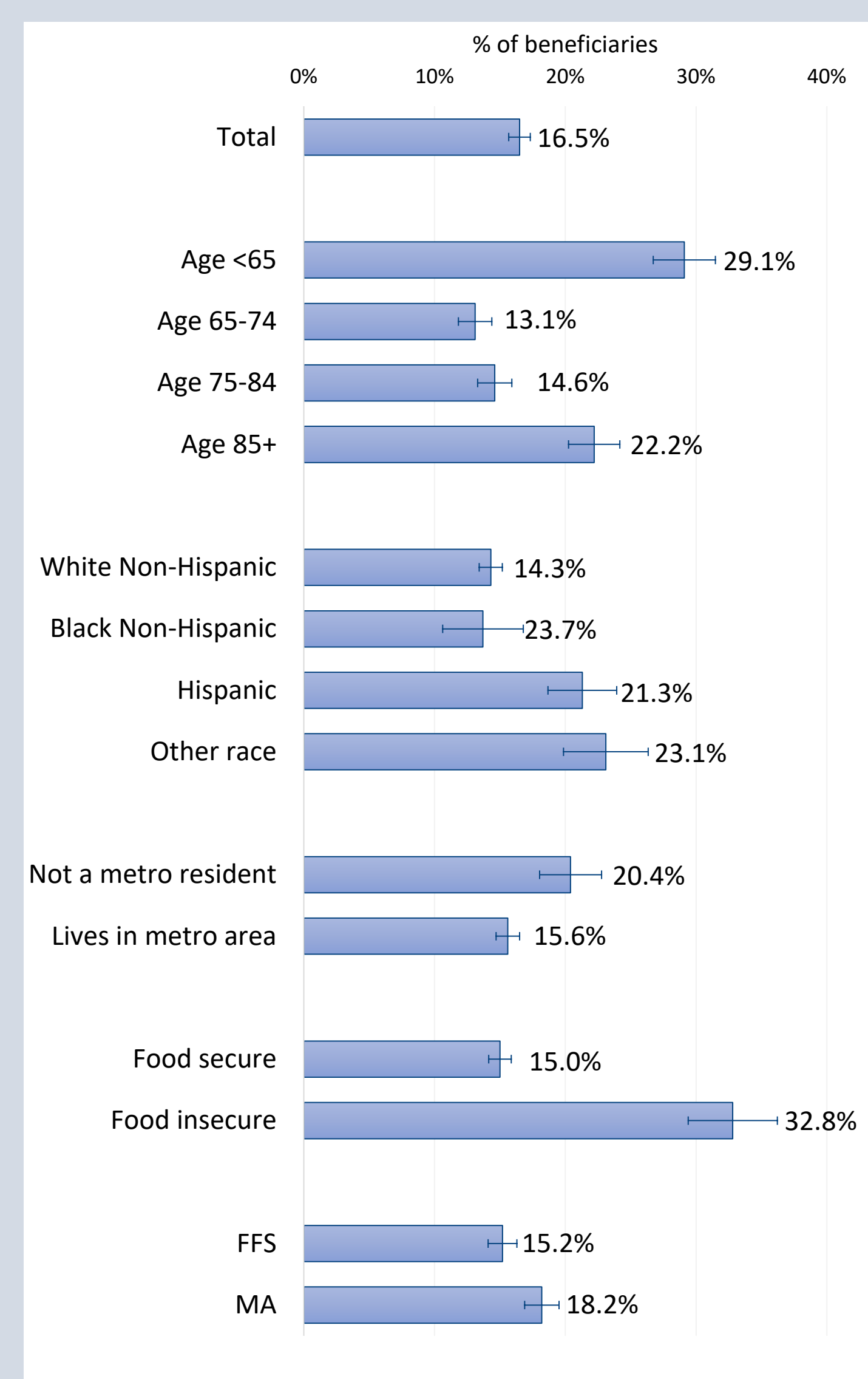
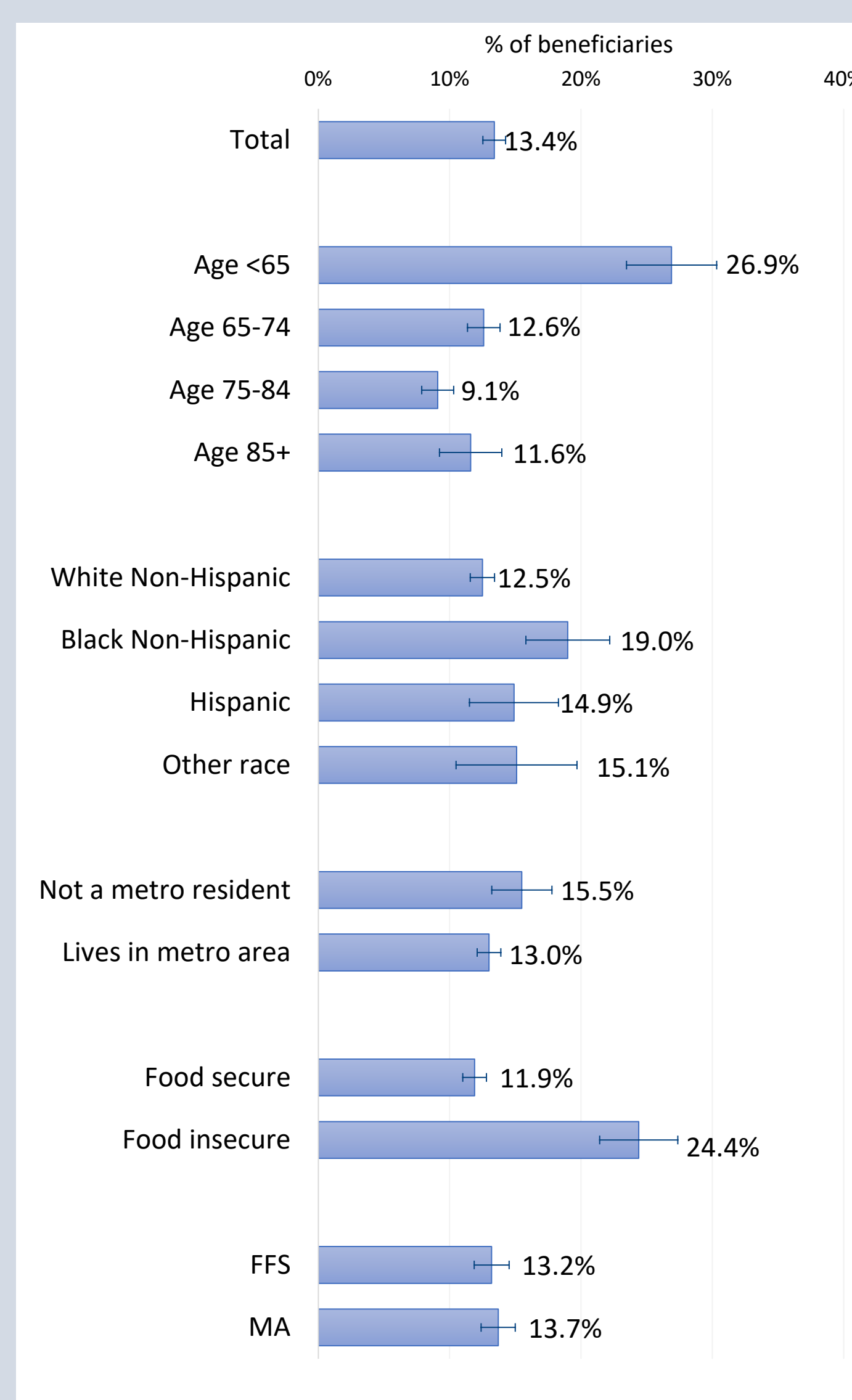


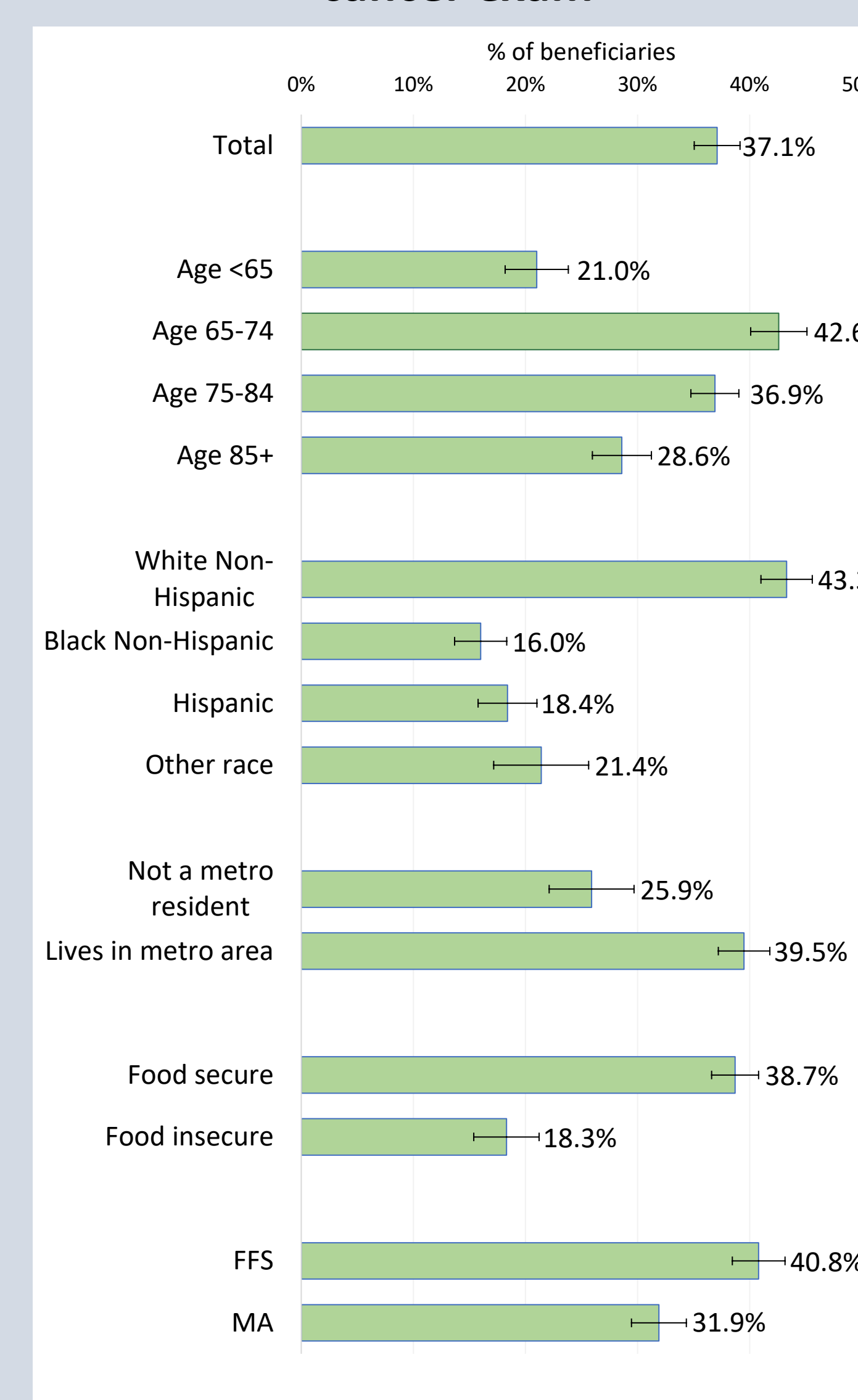
Fig. 2: Beneficiary had chronic tooth pain



Source data: 2020 MCBS Survey File
Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Prevention

Fig. 3: Beneficiary has ever had an oral cancer exam



Source data: 2020 MCBS Survey File
Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Summary of findings

Among community-living Medicare beneficiaries...

- A substantial proportion of Medicare beneficiaries reported chronic oral health issues:
 - One in six had trouble eating solid food due to oral health problems.
 - One in seven had chronic tooth pain.
 - Oral health issues were more common among Medicare beneficiaries under the age of 65, as well as food-insecure beneficiaries.
- More than one in three reported ever having an oral cancer exam.
 - Beneficiaries who were white, metro residents, food secure, or had FFS were more likely to report a history of oral cancer exam.
- One in seven Medicare beneficiaries reported being unable to access dental care for any reason.
 - 4.3% of beneficiaries were unable to access dental care due to cost.
 - Access to dental care was more difficult for beneficiaries who were food insecure or who were Medicare-Medicaid dually-eligible.

Access to dental care

Fig. 4: Beneficiary was ever unable to access dental care, for any reason

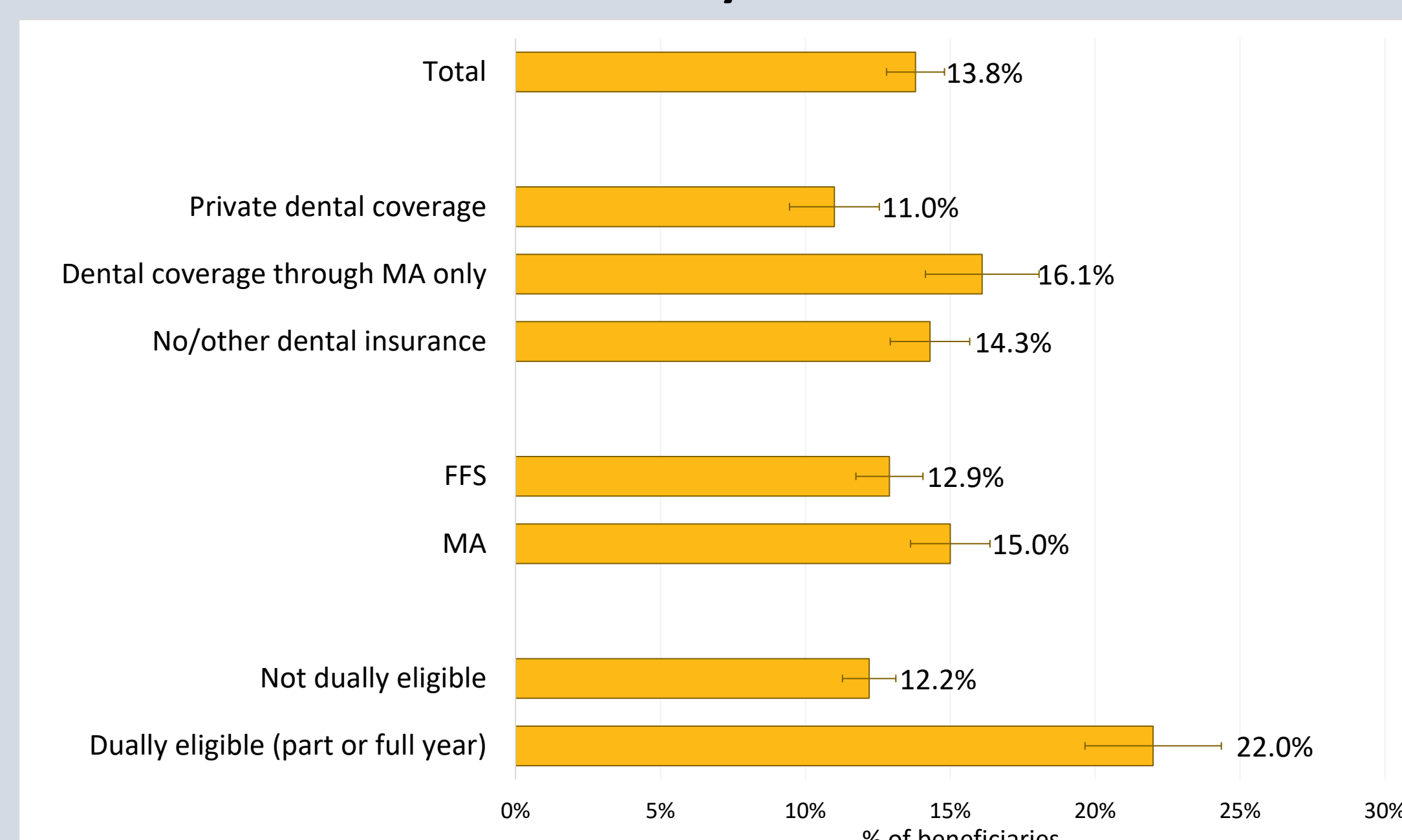
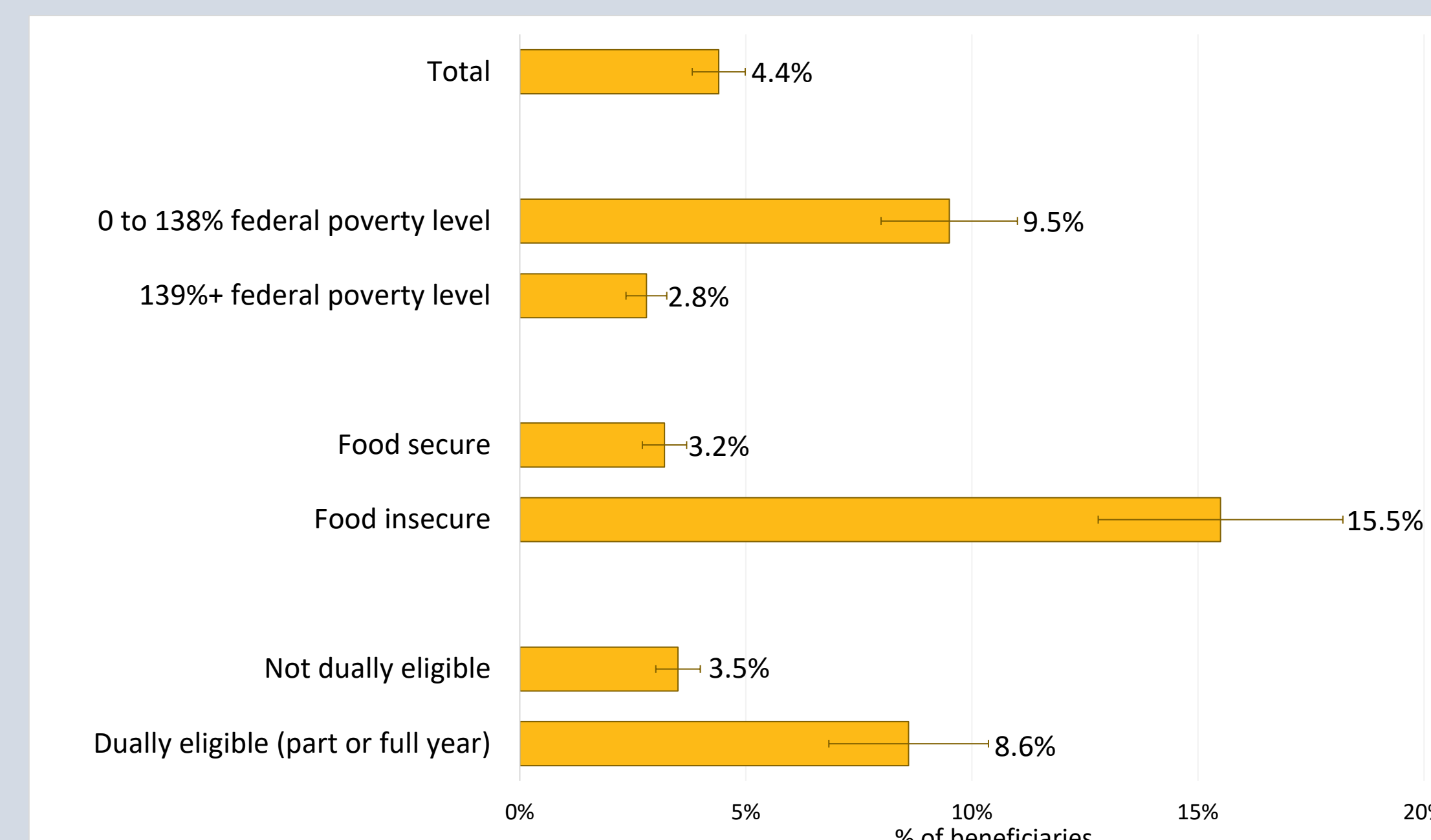


Fig. 5: Beneficiary was ever unable to access dental care, due to cost.



Source data: 2020 MCBS Survey File
Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

How to access this data

This data is available as part of the 2020 MCBS Survey Files. Access to these files requires a fee and a completed data use agreement. For additional information, see <https://www.cms.gov/research-statistics-data-and-systems/files-for-order/limiteddatasets/mcbs>

For questions, please contact us at:
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