National Trends in Dental Care Use, Dental Insurance Coverage, and Cost Barriers

Based on the latest available data from multiple sources as of September 2026.

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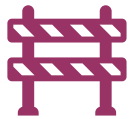
In this Report

This update on several key markers of dental care access in the U.S. is based on the latest data from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) and the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) as of September 2026.

Dental Care Utilization: Population with a dental visit broken down by age, race/ethnicity, federal poverty level, and insurance type.

Dental Insurance Coverage: Distribution of dental insurance coverage (private, public, uninsured) by age, race/ethnicity, and federal poverty level.



Cost Barriers to Dental Care: Population not receiving needed health care services (dental, medical, prescription drugs, and mental health) due to cost broken down by age, race/ethnicity, federal poverty level, and insurance type.

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Dental Care Utilization

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Key Takeaways – Dental Care Utilization

Dental care utilization in the U.S. **trended upward in 2024**, with just under half of the population (47%) visiting a dentist in 2024, up from 46% the previous year. Despite the steady increase in utilization that has occurred since the COVID-19 pandemic, **disparities remain fixed** when broken down by population cohort:

- **Age**: 53% of children visited the dentist compared to 41% of working-age adults.
- **Race/ethnicity**: 54% of the white population visited the dentist compared to 34% of the Hispanic population.
- **Income level**: 59% of the population at or above 400% of the federal poverty level (FPL) visited the dentist compared to 29% of the population below 100% FPL.
- **Dental insurance type**: 58% of the population with private dental insurance visited the dentist compared to 33% with public insurance and 31% with no insurance.
- **Medicare Advantage**: Utilization among seniors with a Medicare Advantage dental benefit increased from 53% in 2023 to 61% in 2024.

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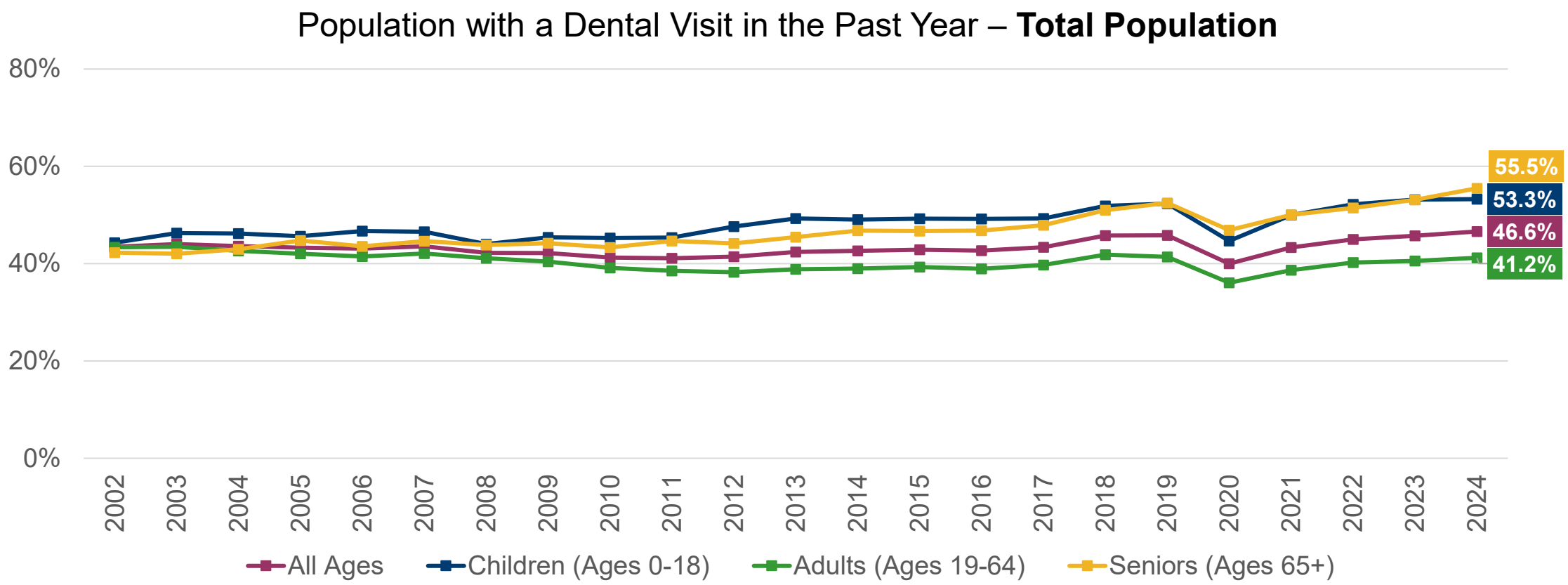
Dental Care Utilization by Age



Source: Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)

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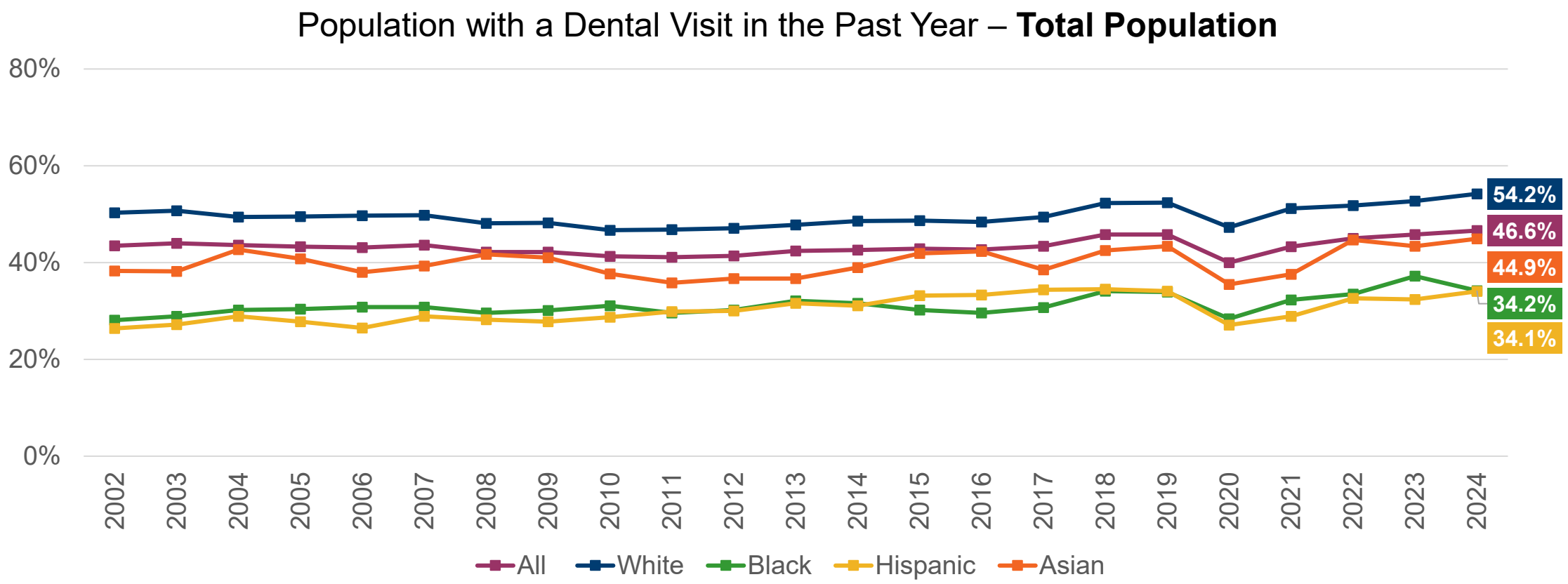
Dental Care Utilization by Race/Ethnicity



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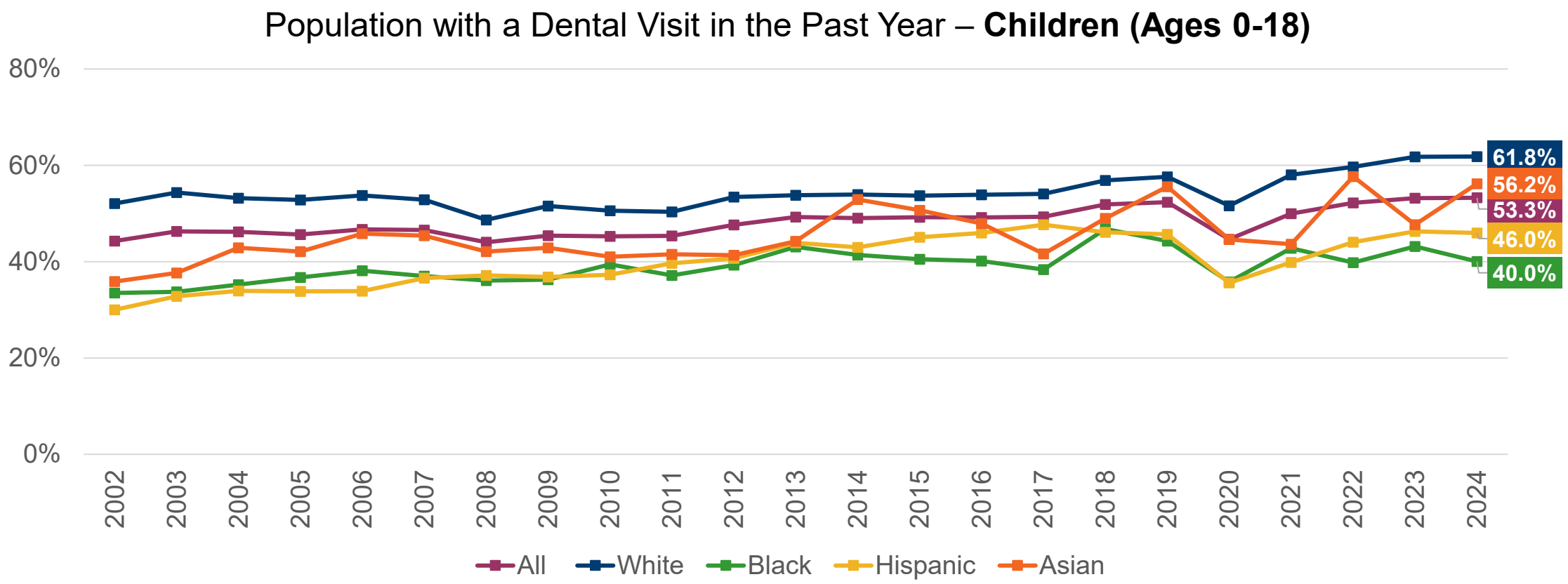
Dental Care Utilization by Age and Race/Ethnicity



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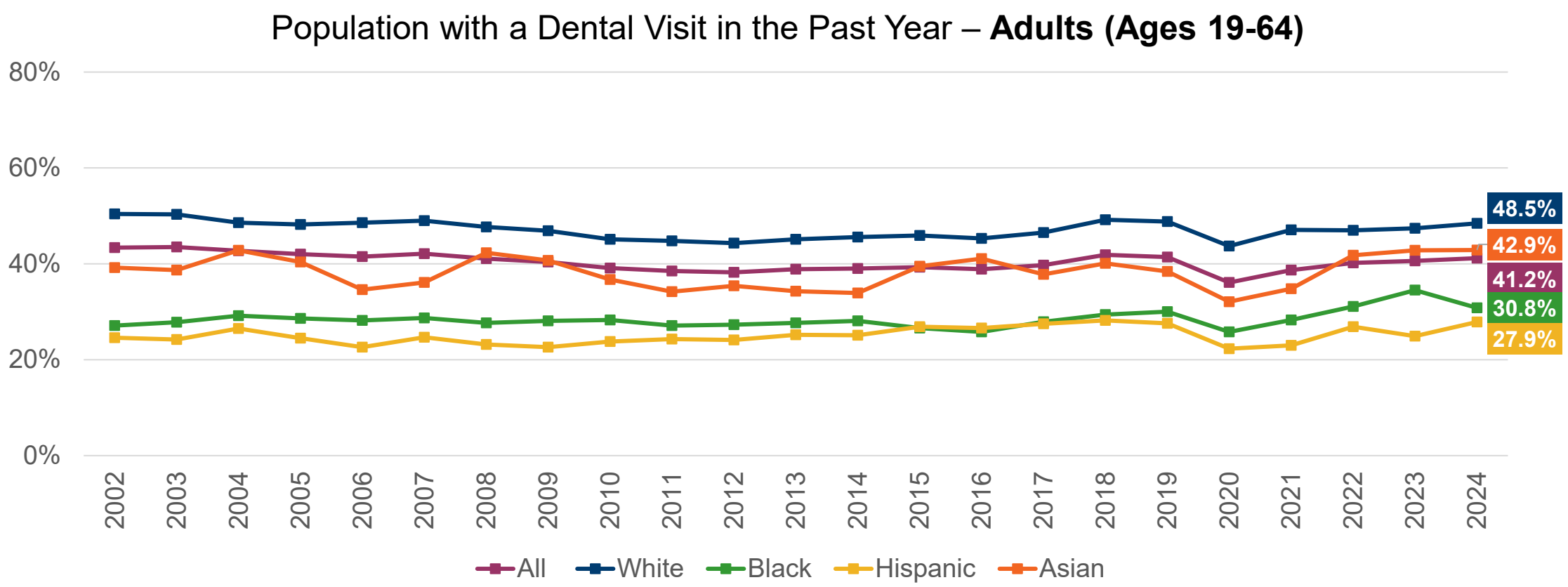
Dental Care Utilization by Age and Race/Ethnicity



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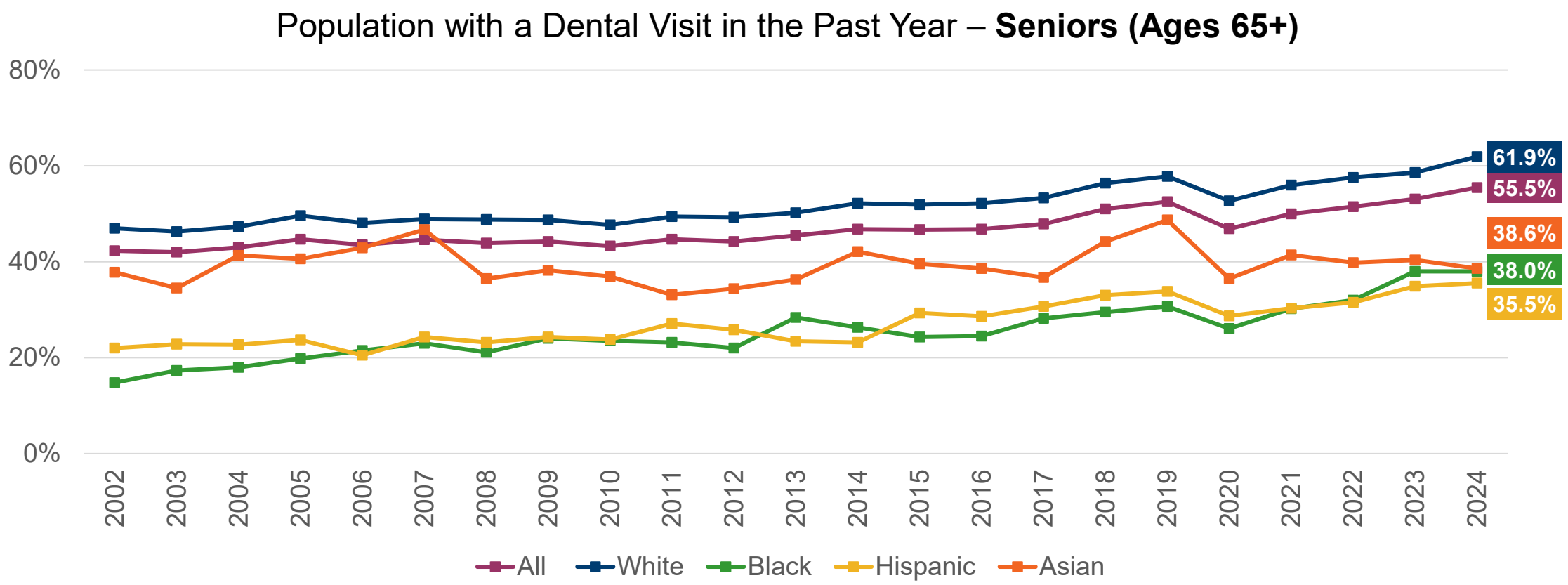
Dental Care Utilization by Age and Race/Ethnicity



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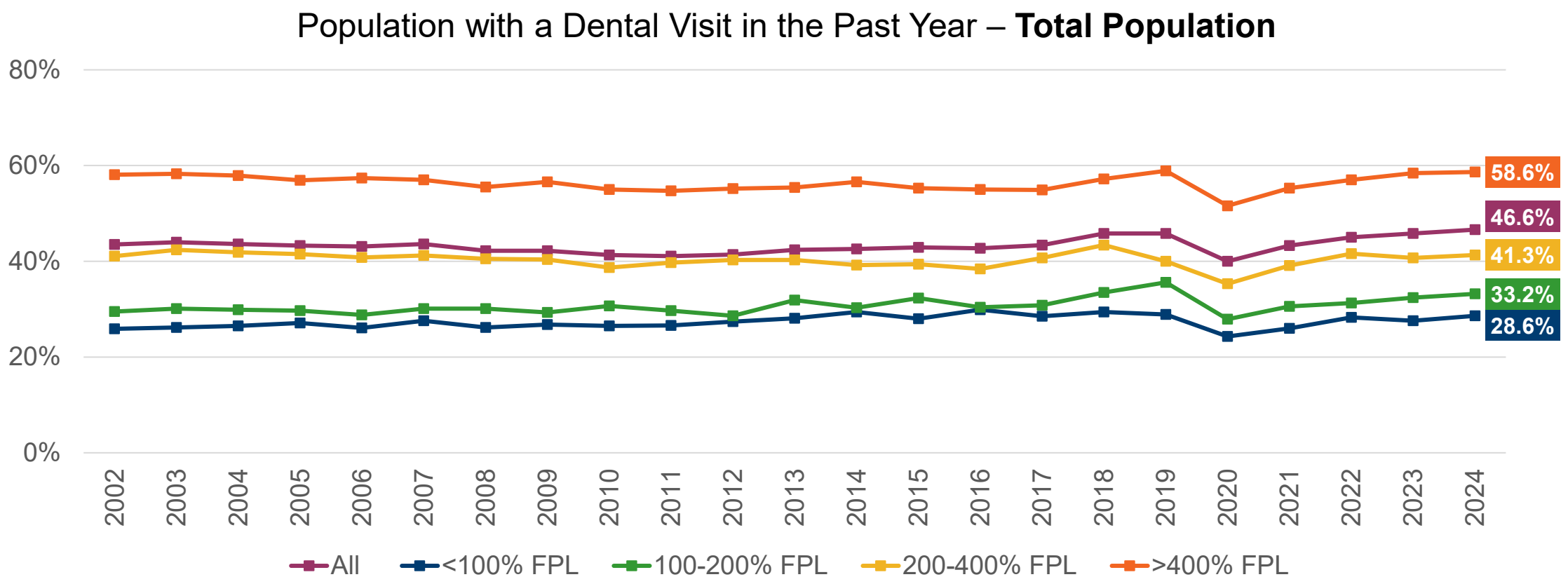
Dental Care Utilization by Income Level



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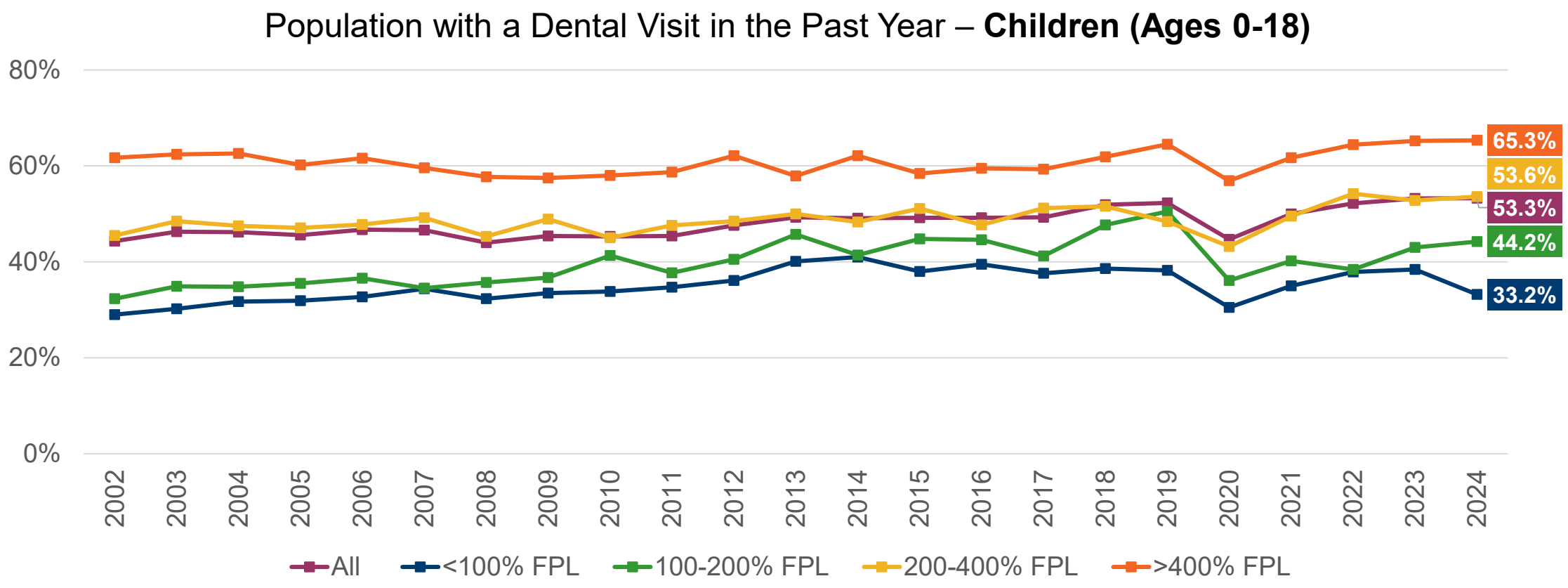
Dental Care Utilization by Age and Income Level



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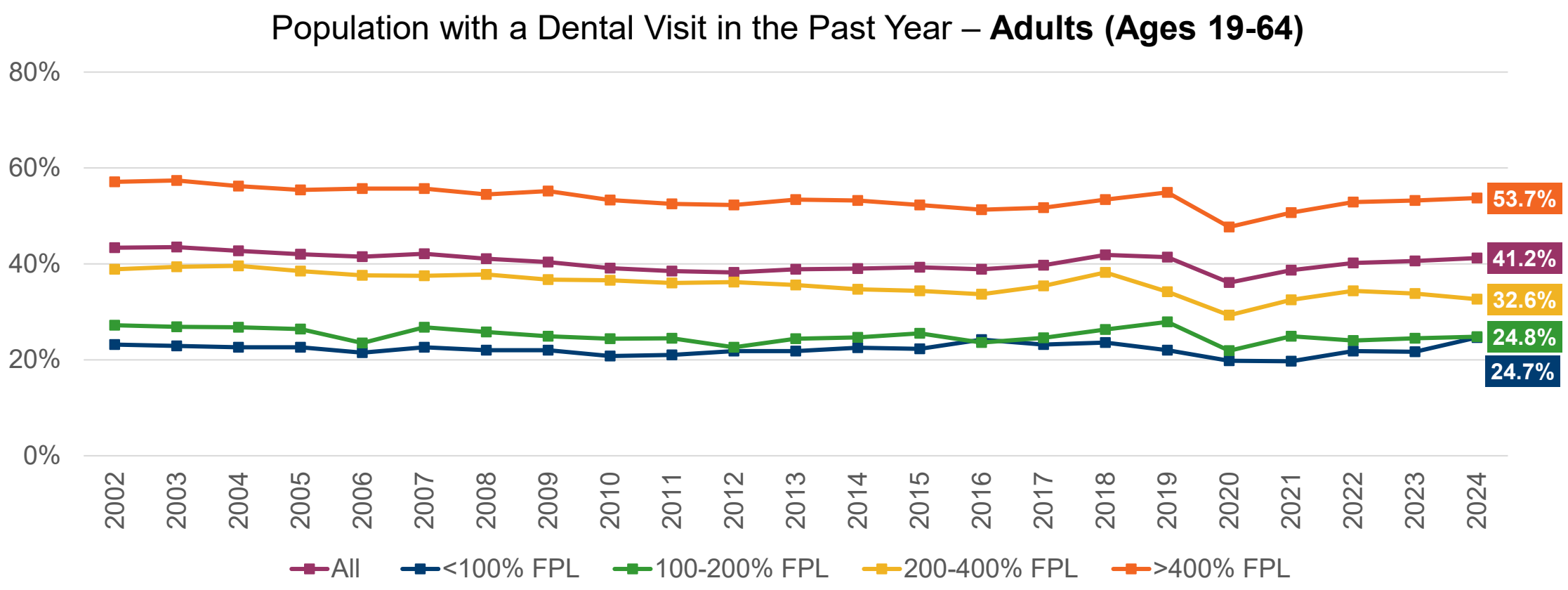
Dental Care Utilization by Age and Income Level



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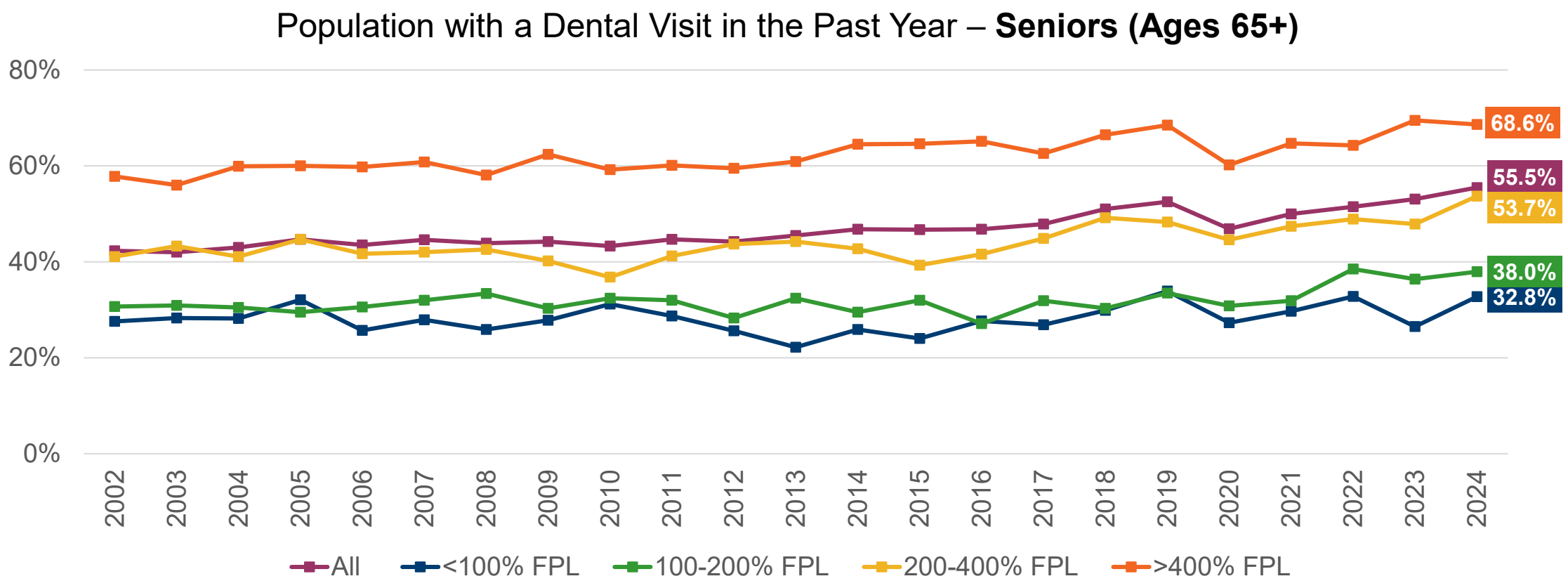
Dental Care Utilization by Age and Income Level



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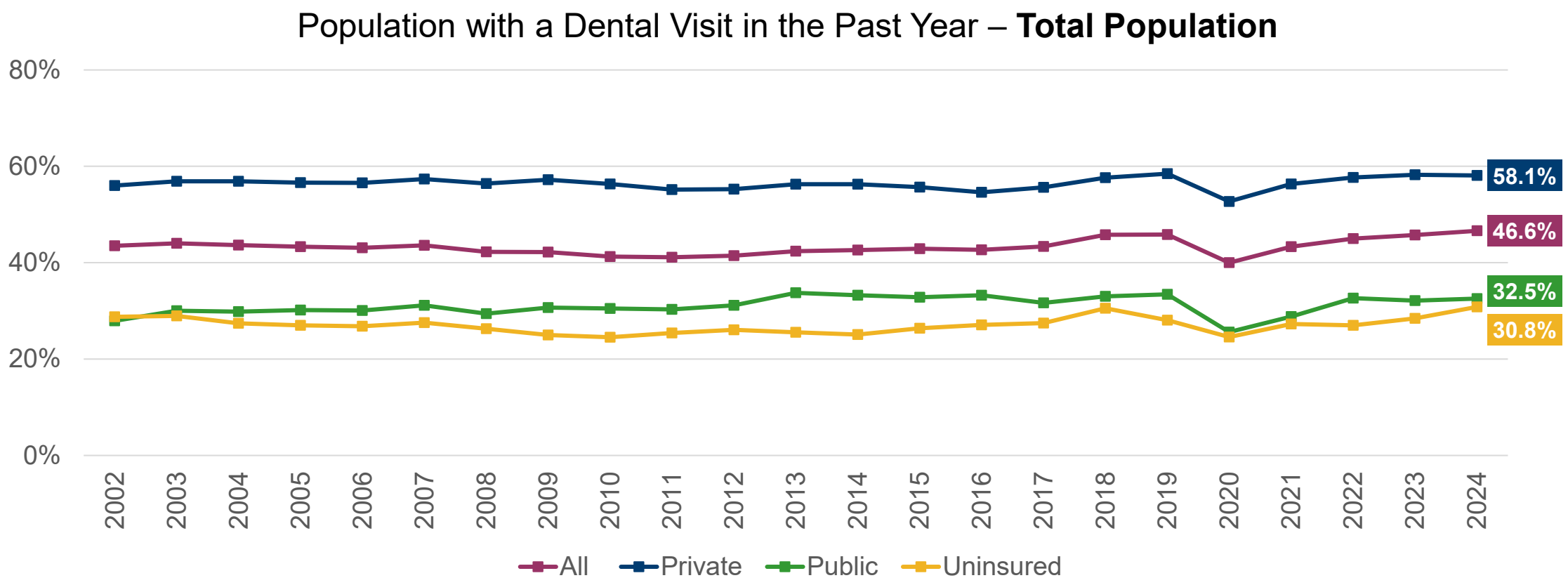
Dental Care Utilization by Insurance Type



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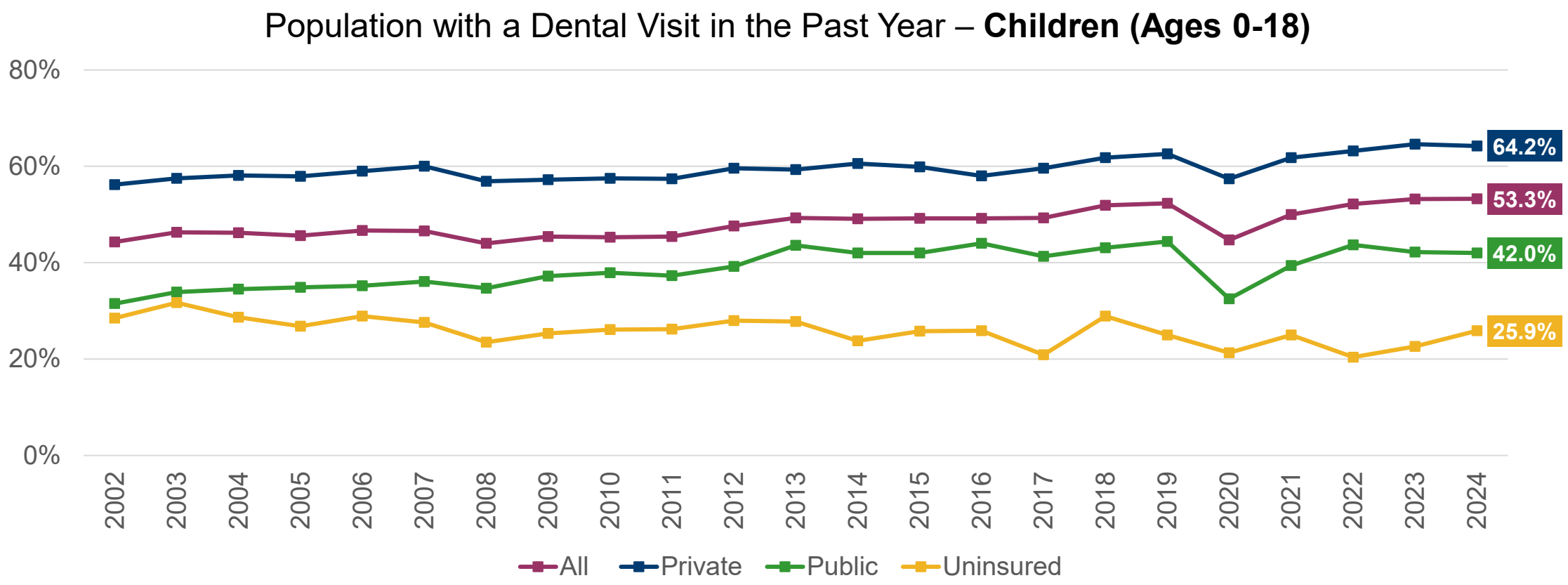
Dental Care Utilization by Age and Insurance Type



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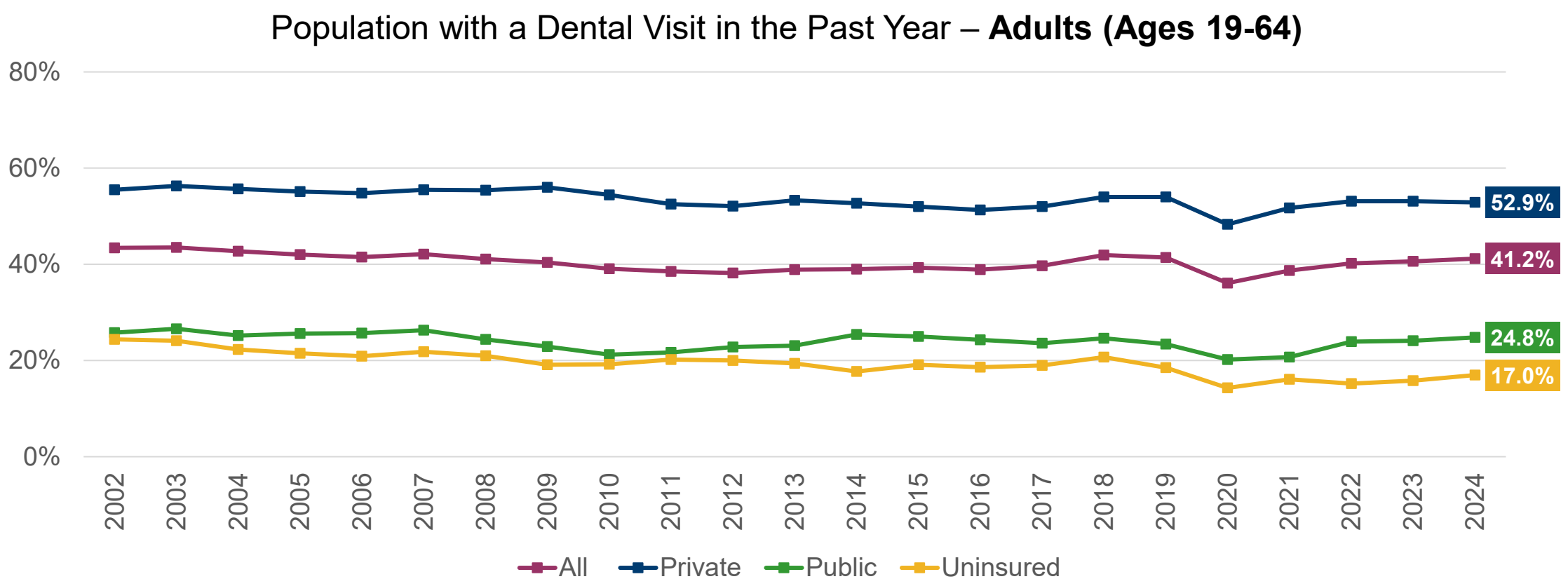
Dental Care Utilization by Age and Insurance Type



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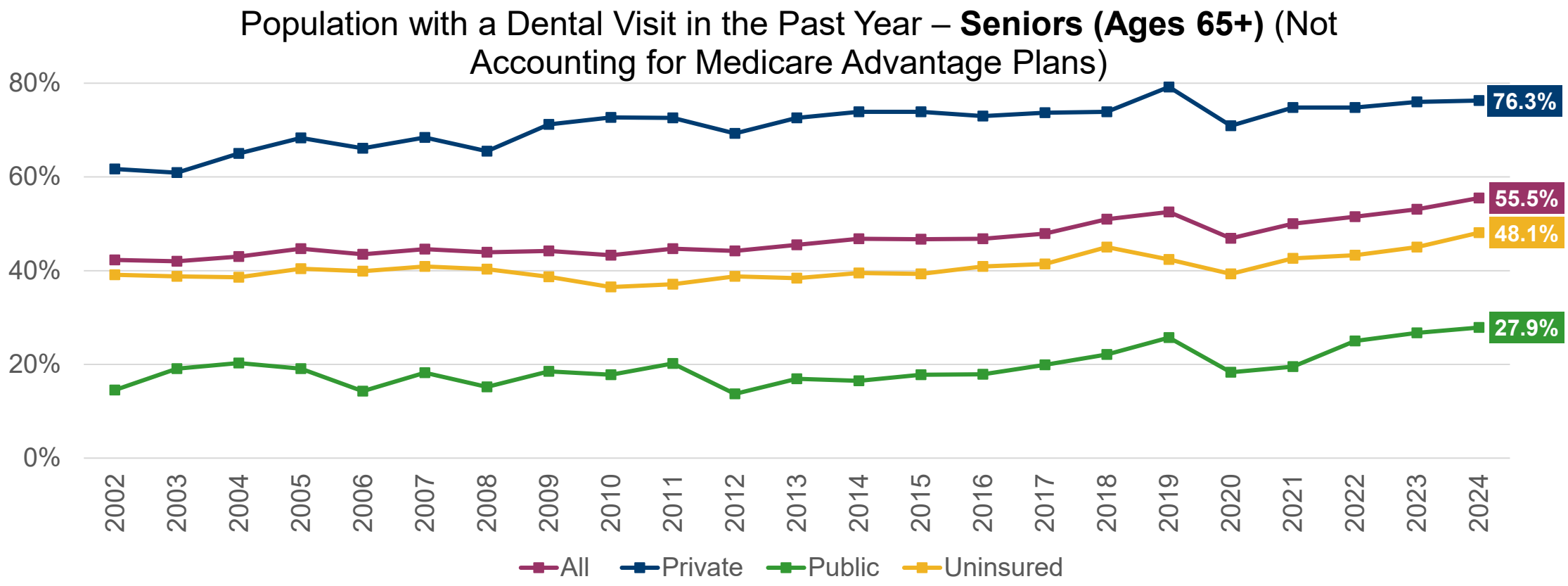
Dental Care Utilization by Age and Insurance Type



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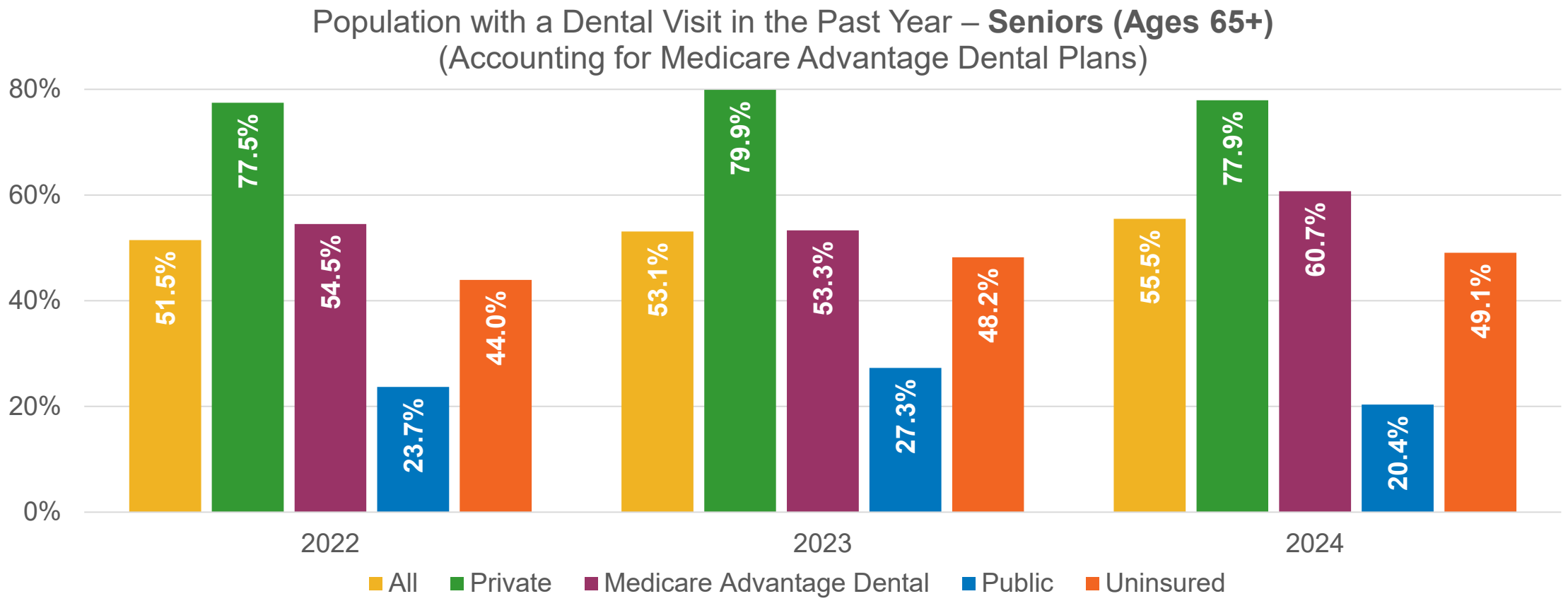

Source: Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)

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Dental Insurance Coverage

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Key Takeaways – Dental Insurance Coverage

As of 2024, more than half of the U.S. population (57%) is covered by private dental insurance while one-fifth (19%) is covered by public insurance and the remaining (24%) is uninsured. The **distribution of dental insurance has shifted** over the years, with the uninsured cohort shrinking (down from 33% in 2002) and the publicly insured cohort growing (up from 13% in 2002). Like with dental care utilization, there are variations in dental insurance coverage by population groups:

- **Age**: 7% of children are uninsured compared to 21% of working-age adults and 37% of seniors (when accounting for Medicare Advantage plans), reflecting federal coverage mandates for children.
- **Race/ethnicity**: Uninsured rates are highest among the Hispanic population (27%) and lowest among the Black population (19%).
- **Income level**: Individuals from households at 100-200% or 200-400% FPL had higher uninsured rates compared to those below 100% FPL (30% and 29% vs. 23%, respectively).

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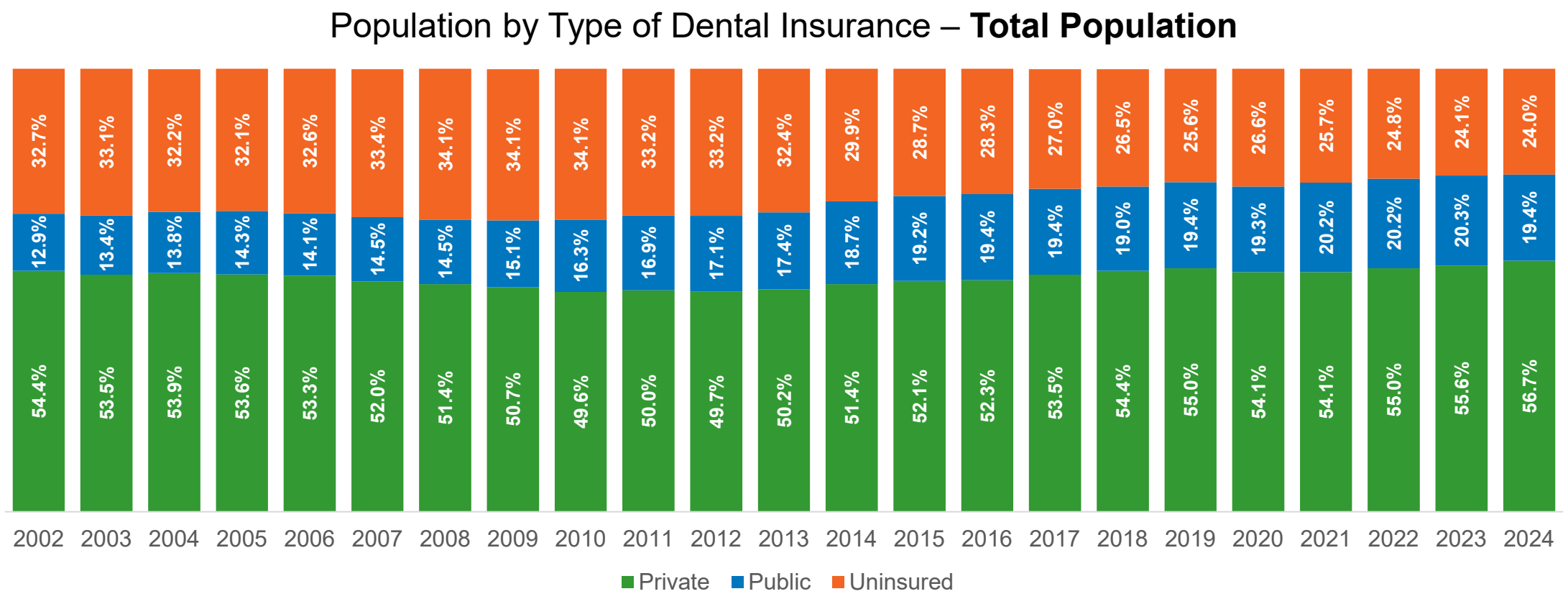
Dental Insurance Coverage



Source: Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)

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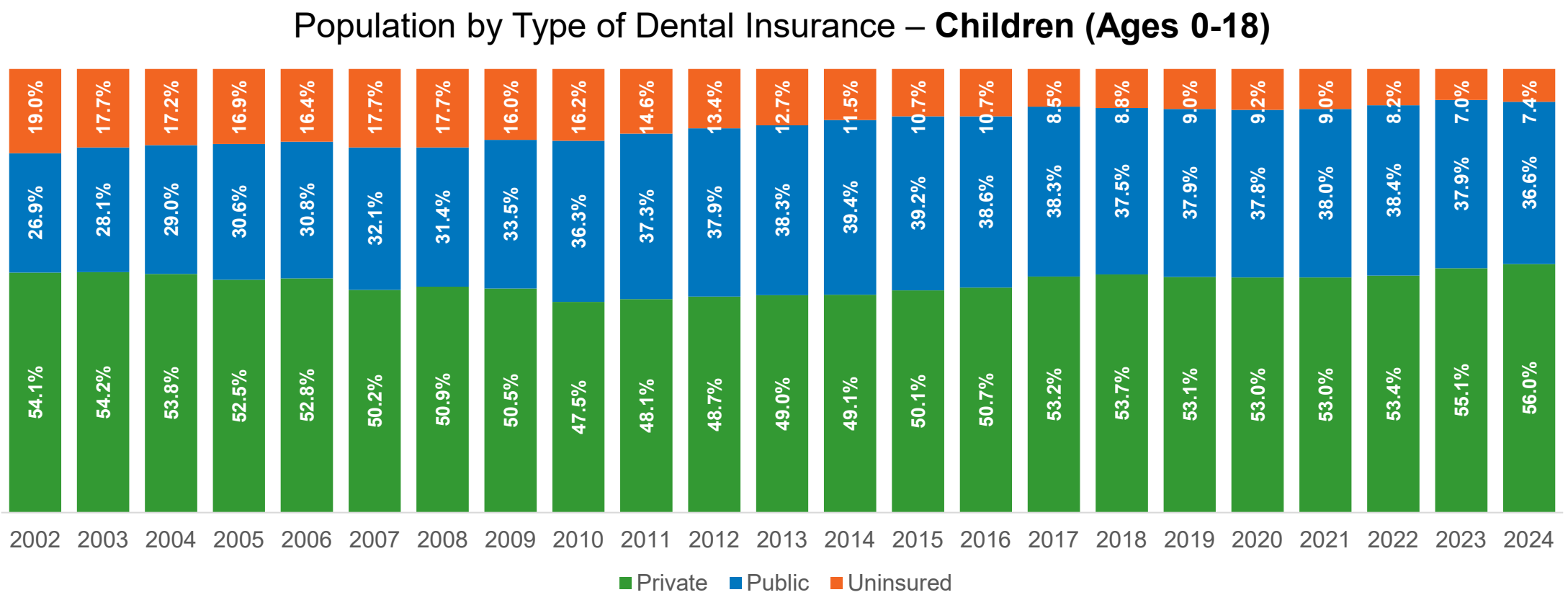
Dental Insurance Coverage by Age



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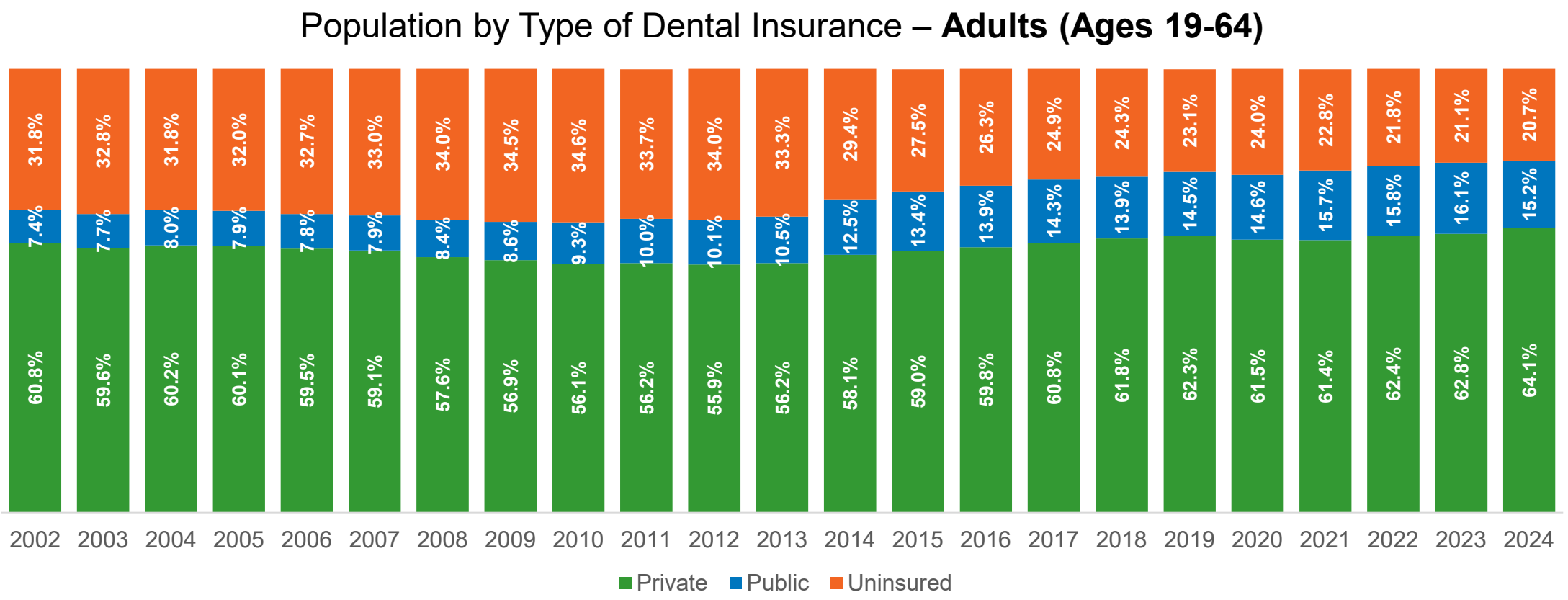
Dental Insurance Coverage by Age



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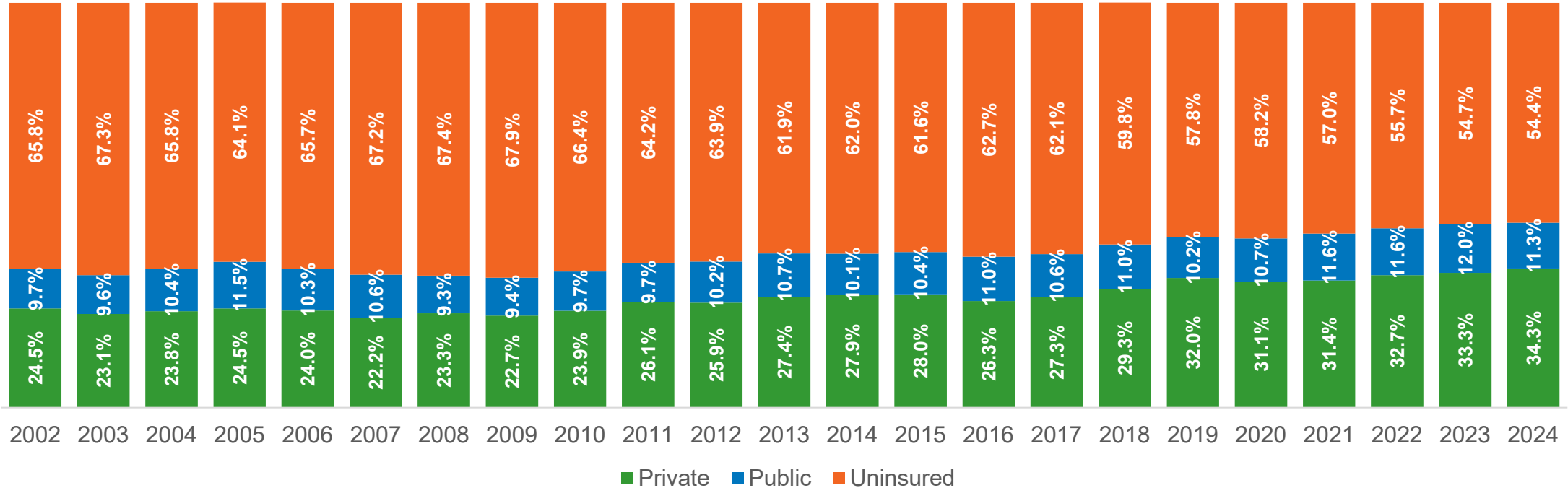
Dental Insurance Coverage by Age

Population by Type of Dental Insurance – **Seniors (Ages 65+)** (Not Accounting for Medicare Advantage Plans)



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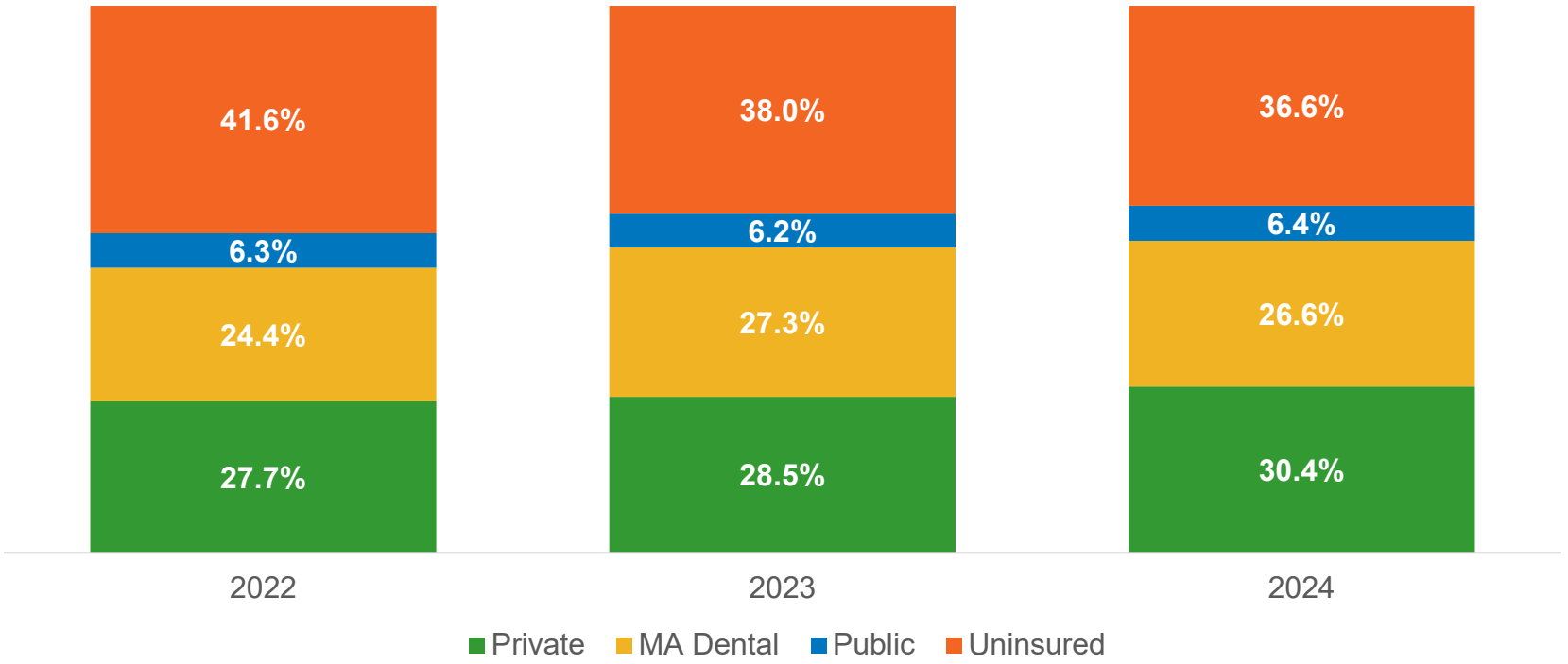
Dental Insurance Status by Age

Percentage by Type of Dental Insurance – **Seniors (Ages 65+)**
(Accounting for Medicare Advantage Plans)



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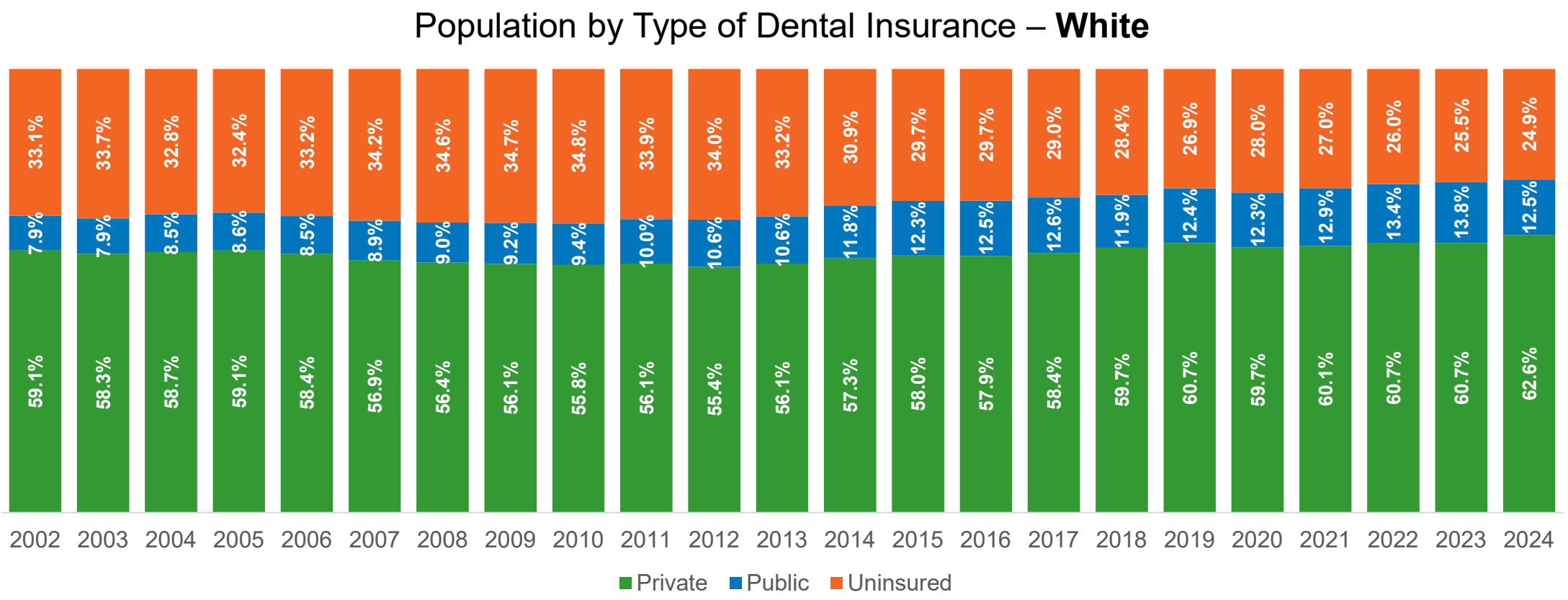
Dental Insurance Coverage by Race/Ethnicity



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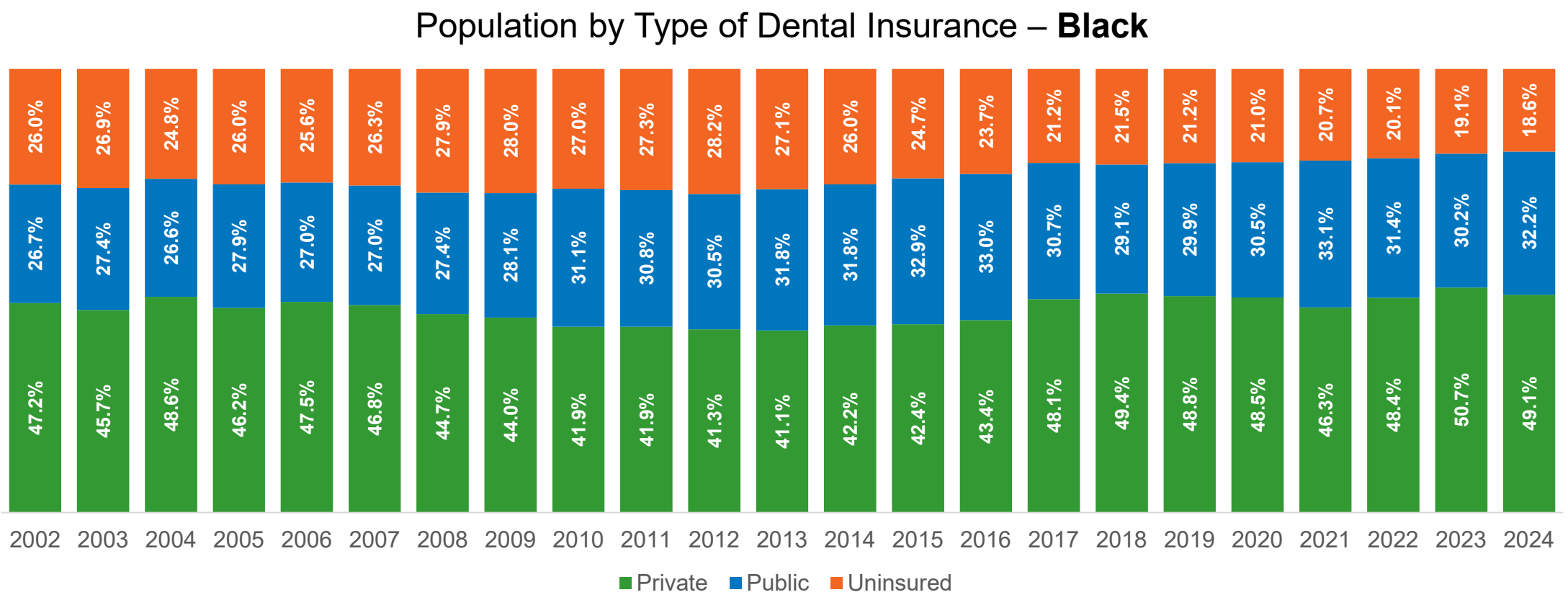

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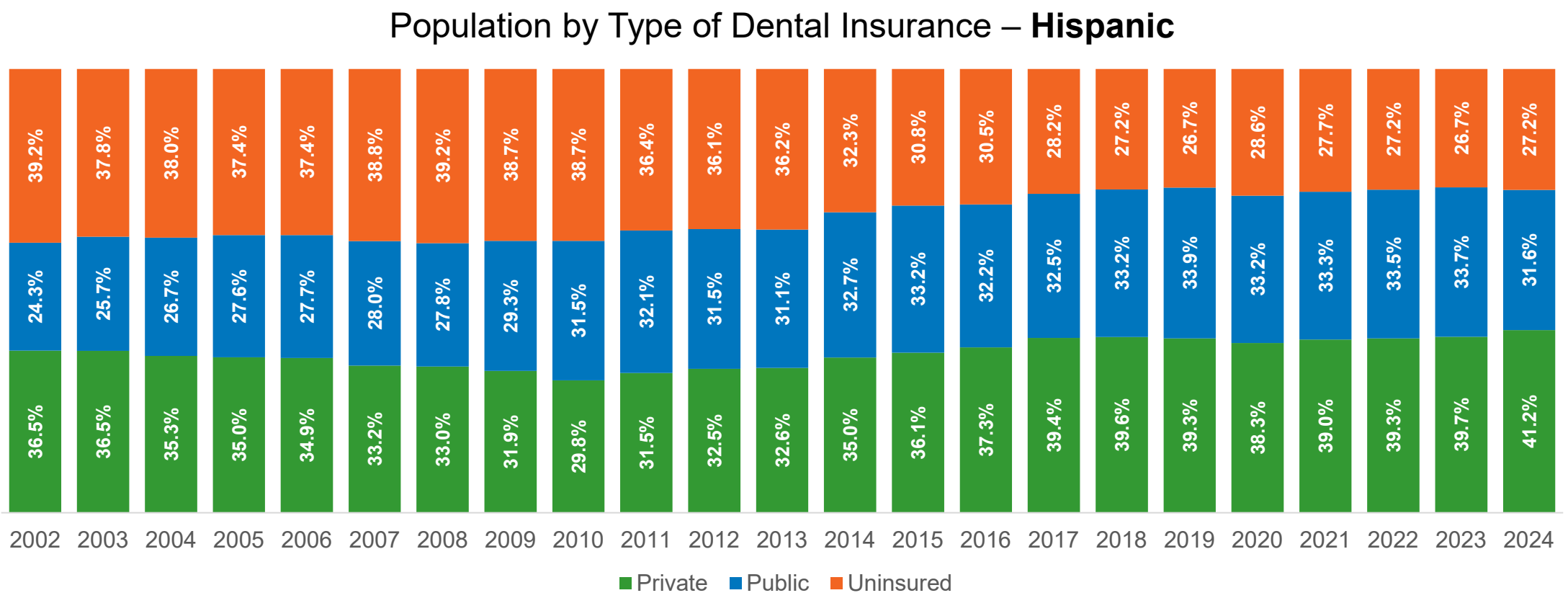

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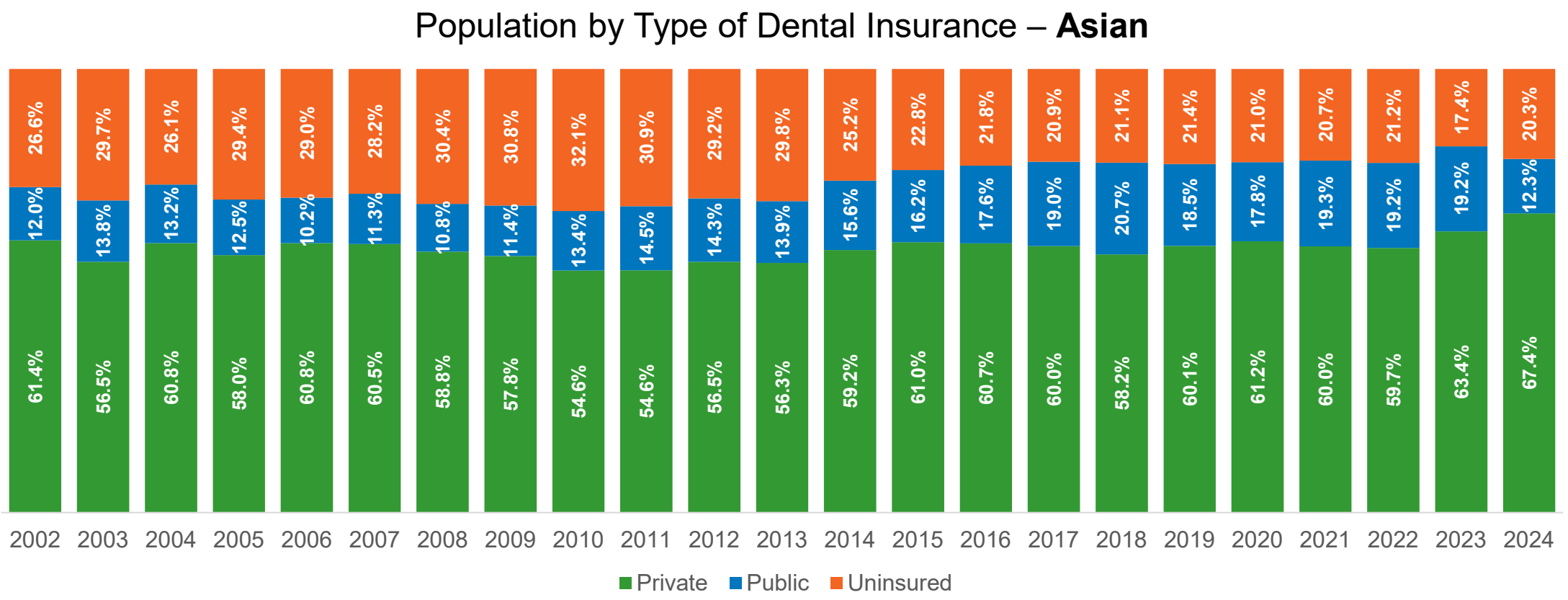
Dental Insurance Coverage by Race/Ethnicity



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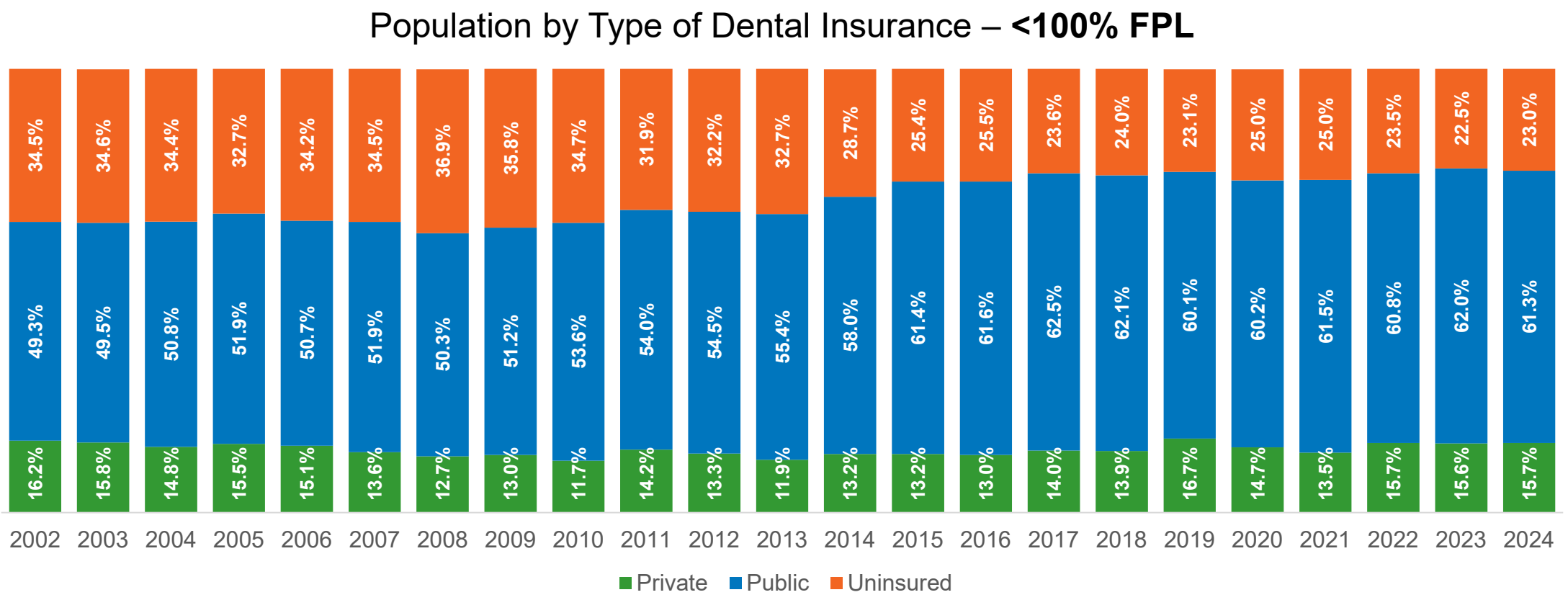
Dental Insurance Coverage by Income Level



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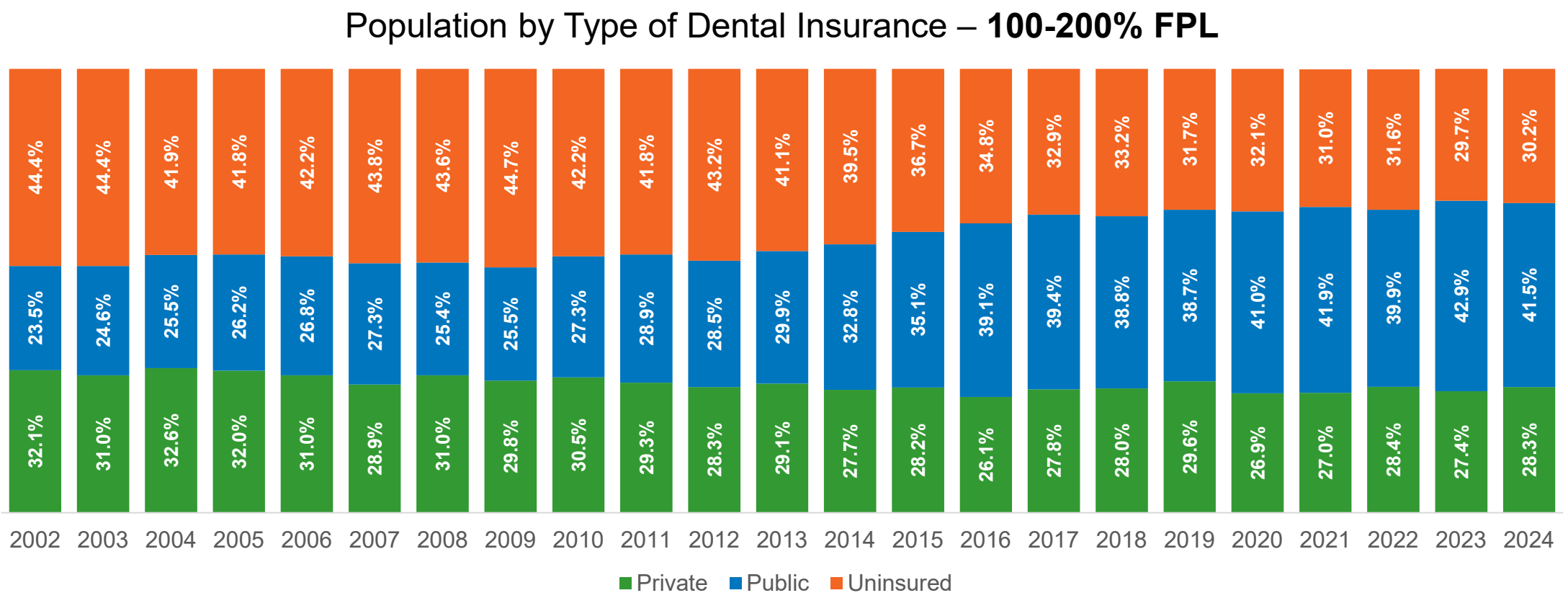
Dental Insurance Coverage by Income Level



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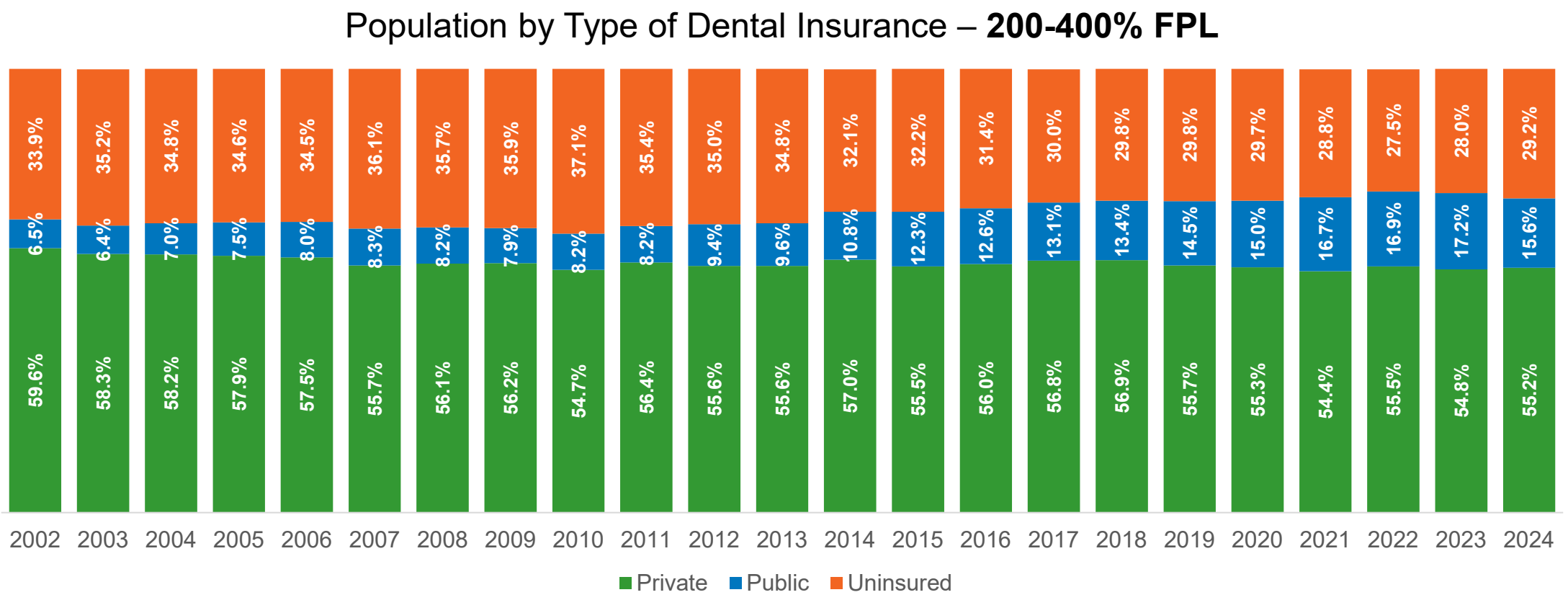
Dental Insurance Coverage by Income Level



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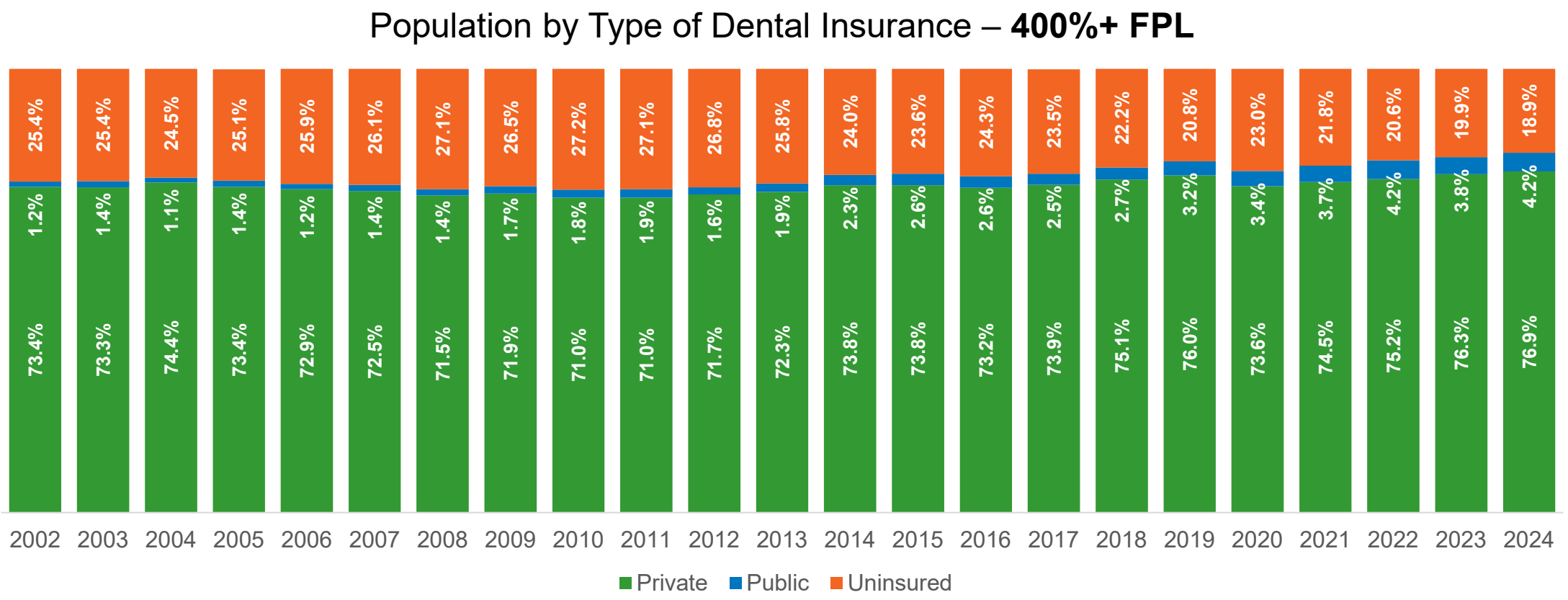
Dental Insurance Coverage by Income Level



Source: Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS)

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Cost Barriers

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Key Takeaways – Cost Barriers to Care

Dental care presents the highest level of cost barriers compared to other categories of health care, including medical and mental health care and prescription drugs. The gap between dental care and other health care services has actually widened in recent years and varies by population cohorts:

- **Age**: Adults reported the highest cost barriers to health care (any service category) compared to children and seniors. Barriers have gone down for children while going up for adults and seniors.
- **Race/ethnicity**: Disparities in cost barriers by race/ethnicity are considerably narrower among children compared to older groups. For adults and seniors, Hispanics are the most likely to report cost barriers.
- **Income level**: Individuals in the <100% and 100-299% FPL groups reported virtually the same level of cost barriers to care.
- **Dental insurance type**: Among children, disparities by insurance type are very narrow compared to older age groups. For adults, those with public insurance and those who are uninsured report cost barriers at nearly the same level.

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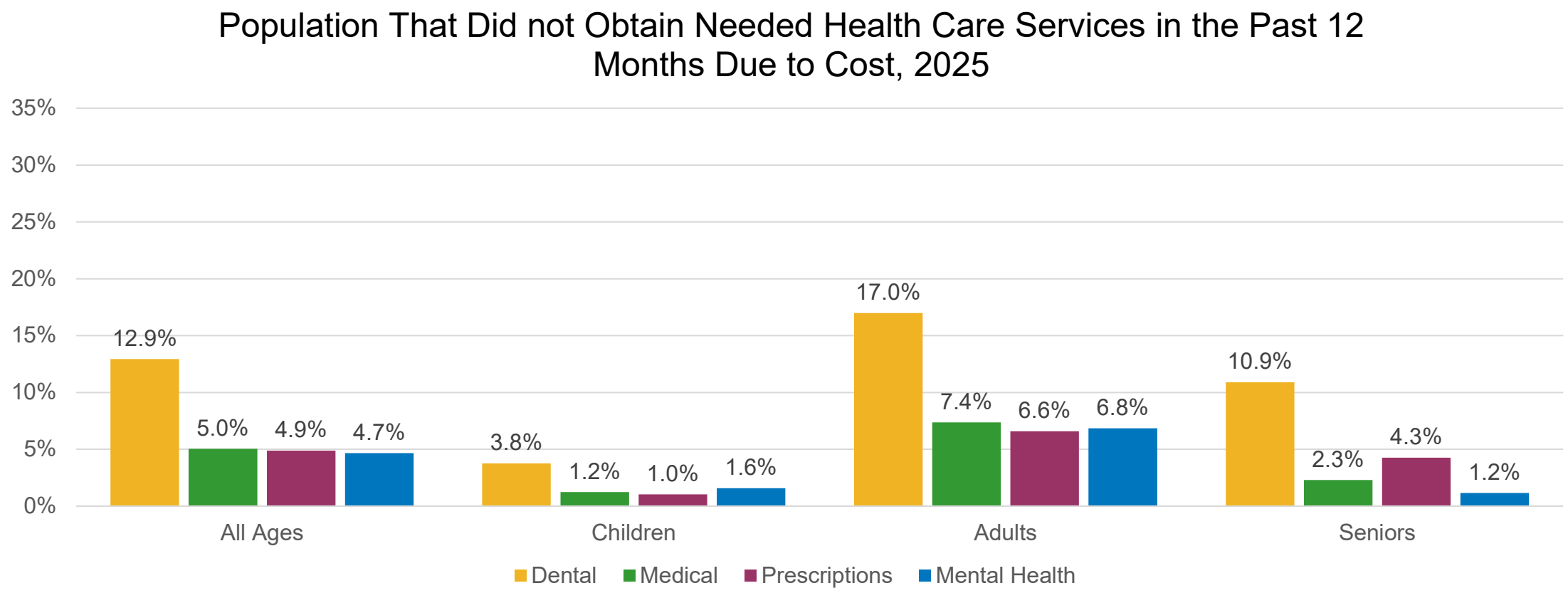
Cost Barriers to Care



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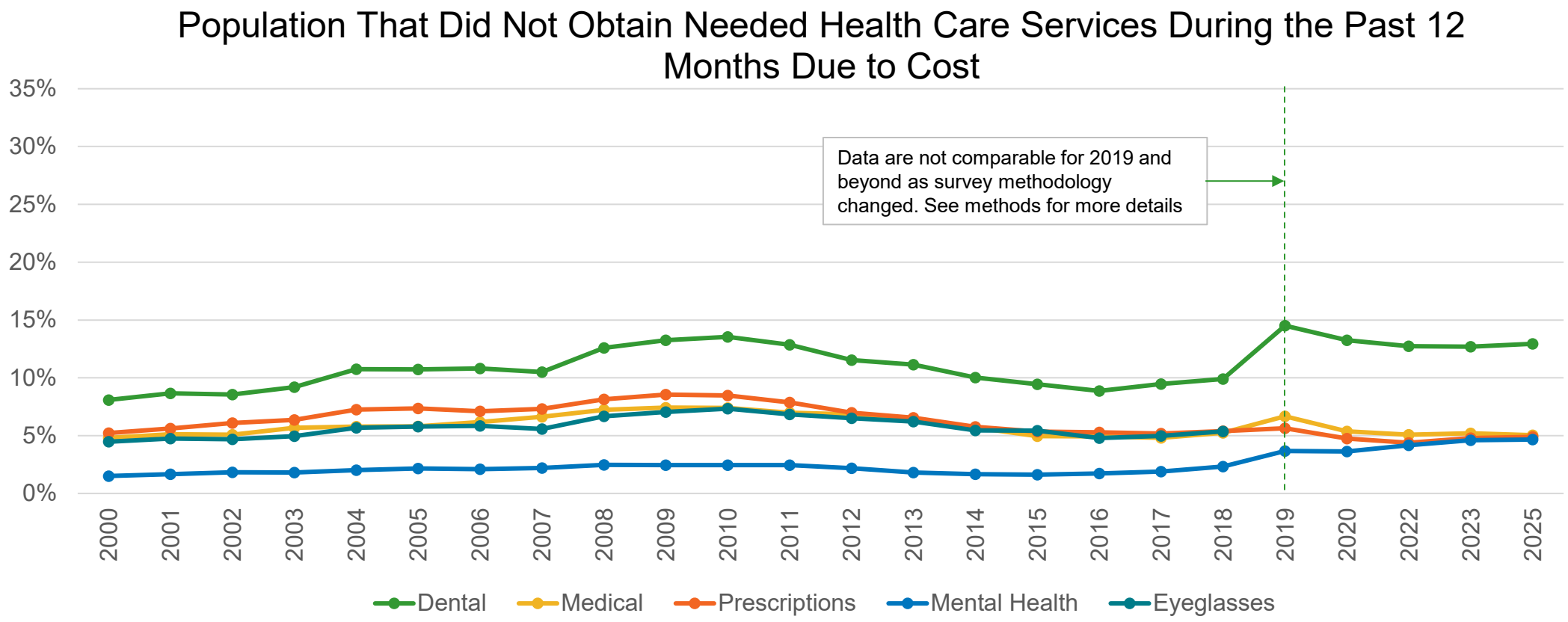
Cost Barriers to Care



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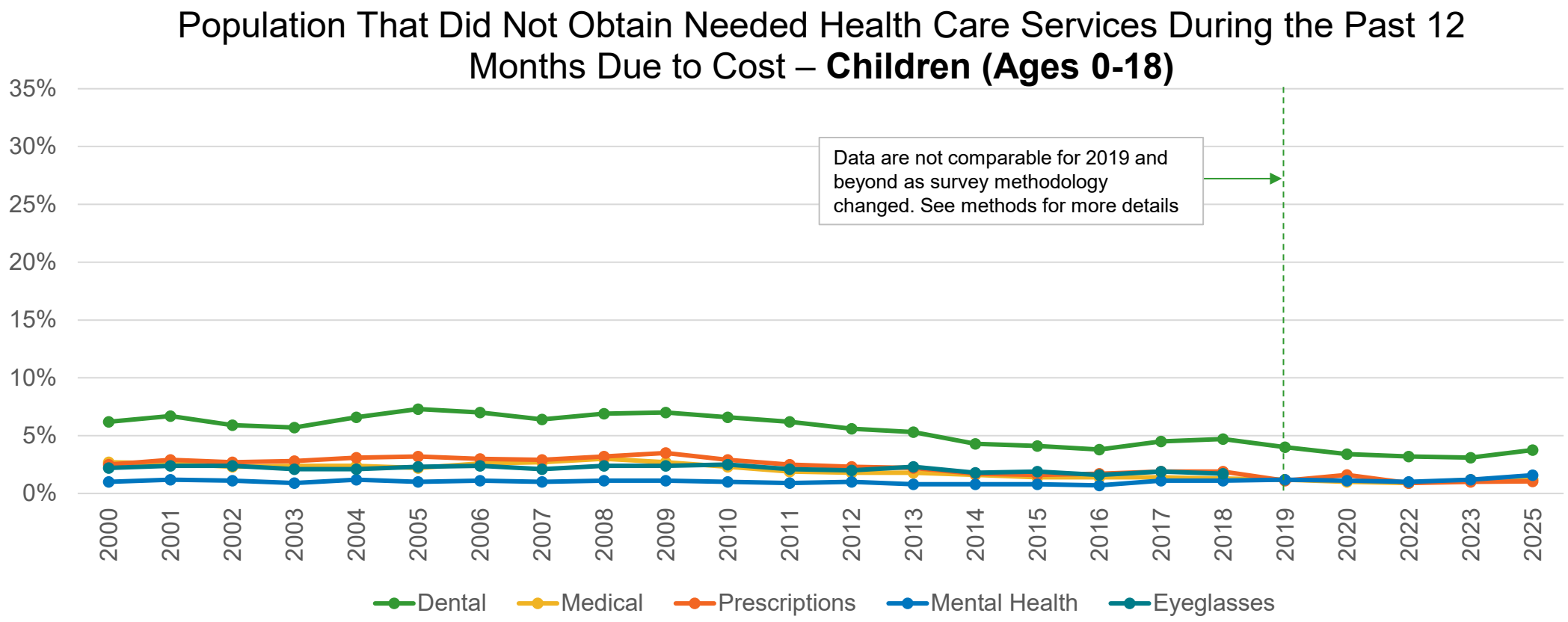
Cost Barriers to Care by Age



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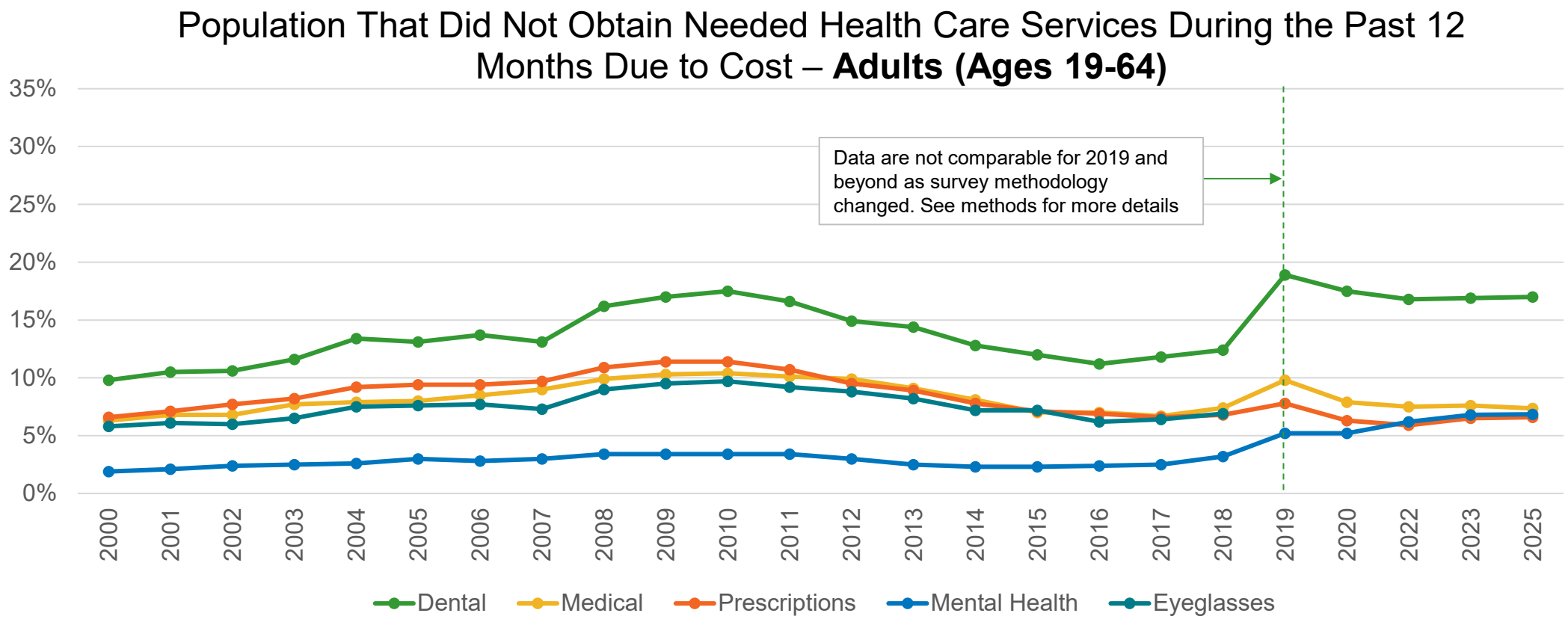

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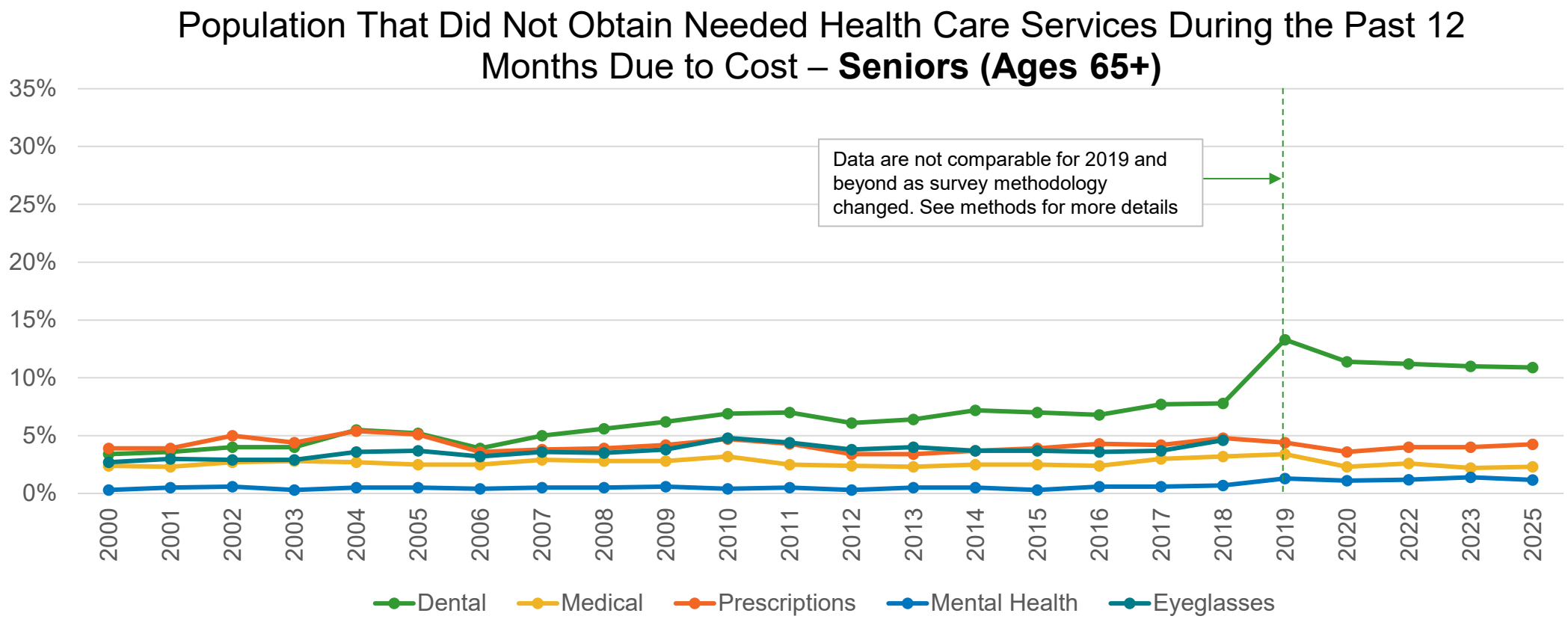
Cost Barriers to Care by Age



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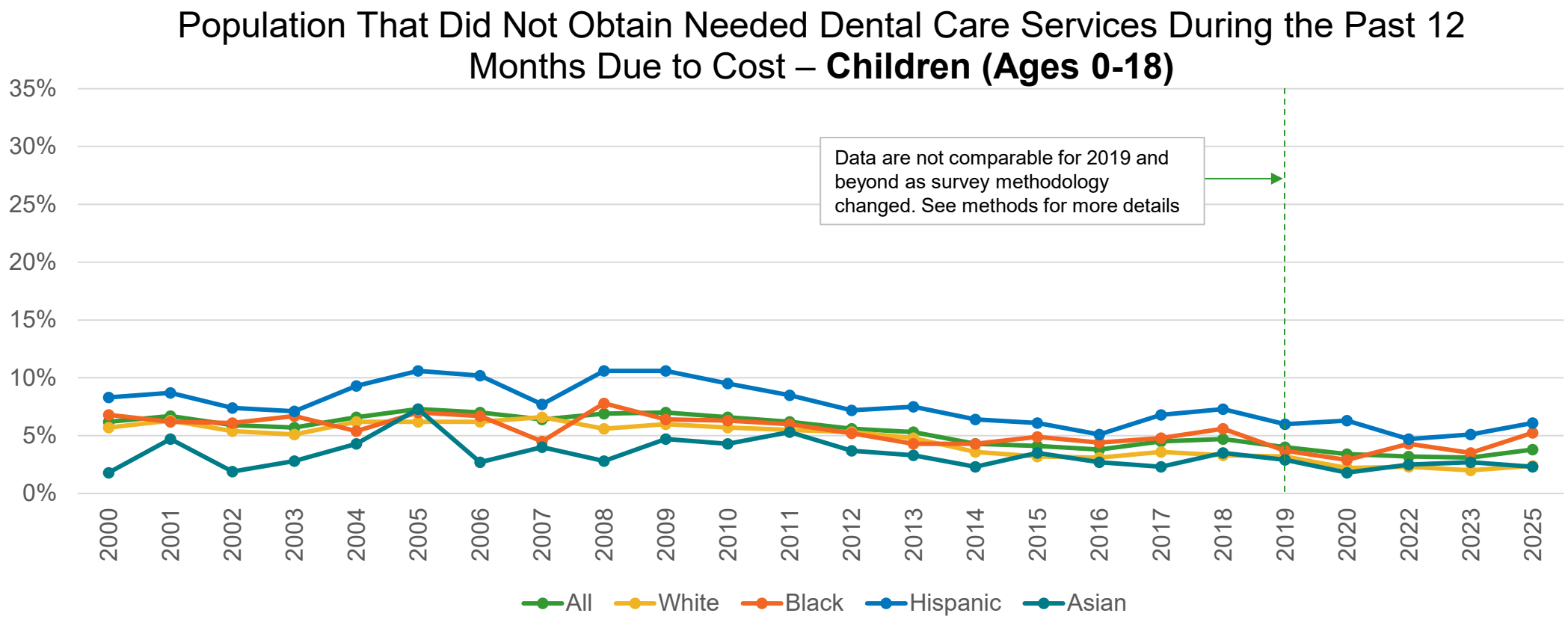
Cost Barriers to Care by Age and Race/Ethnicity



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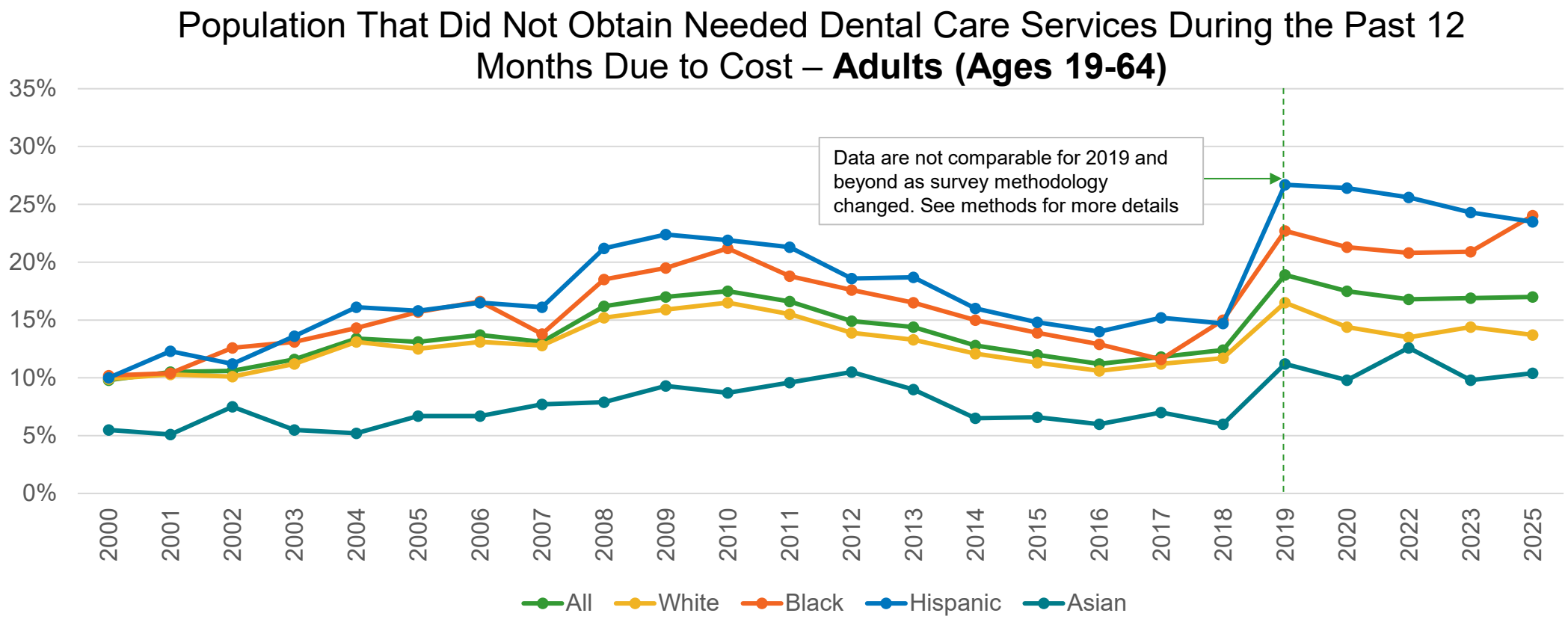
Cost Barriers to Care by Age and Race/Ethnicity



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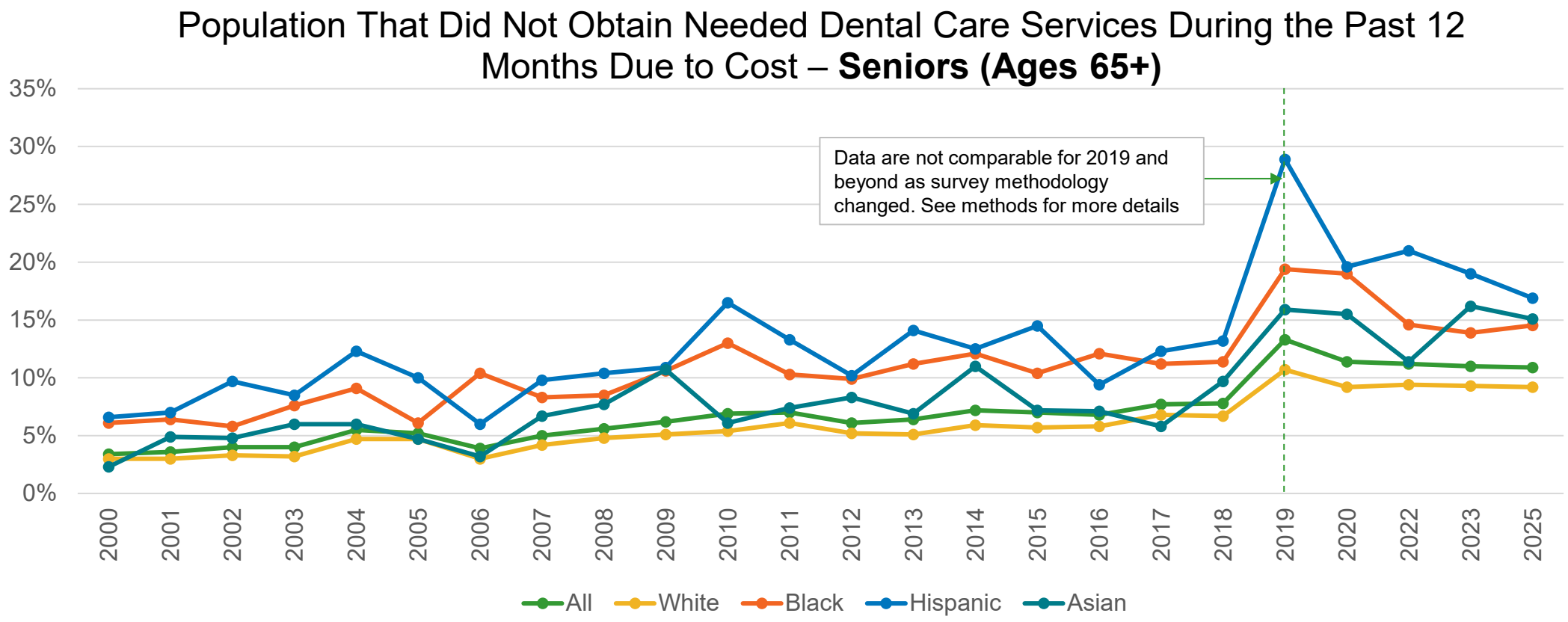
Cost Barriers to Care by Age and Race/Ethnicity



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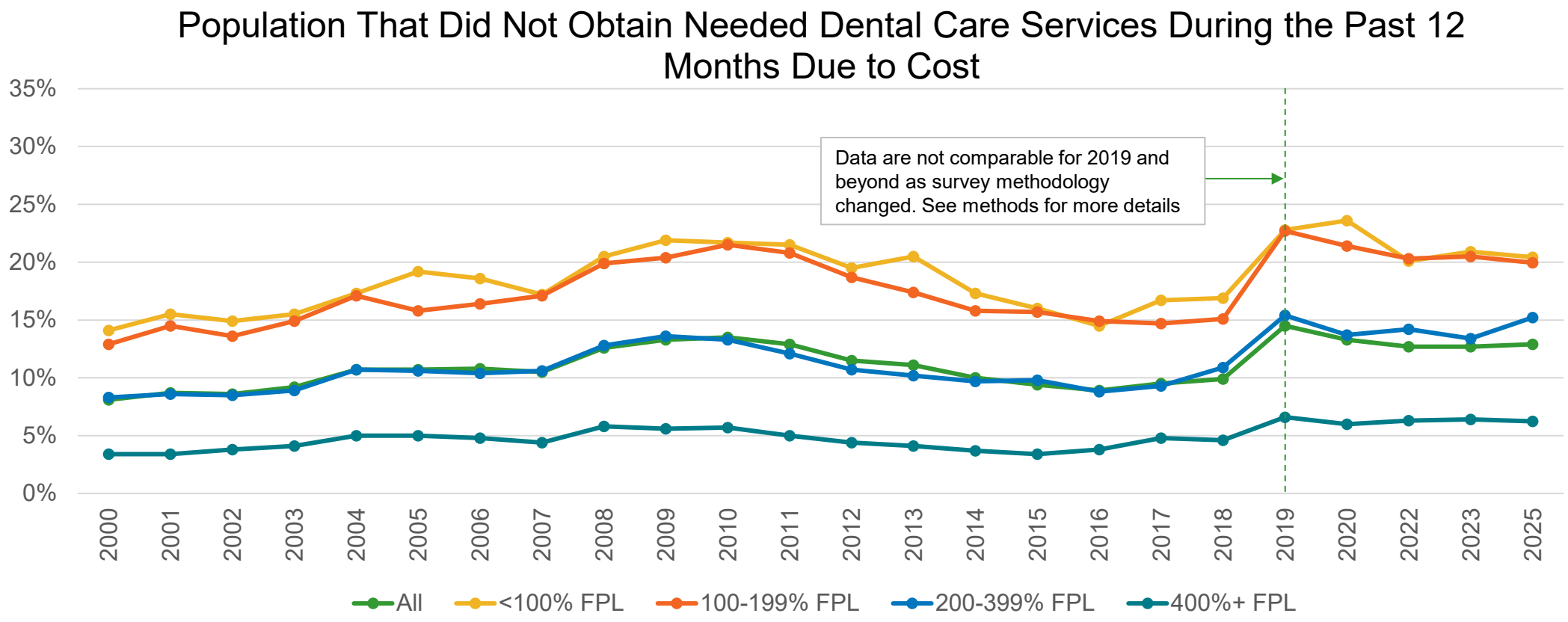
Cost Barriers to Care by Income Level



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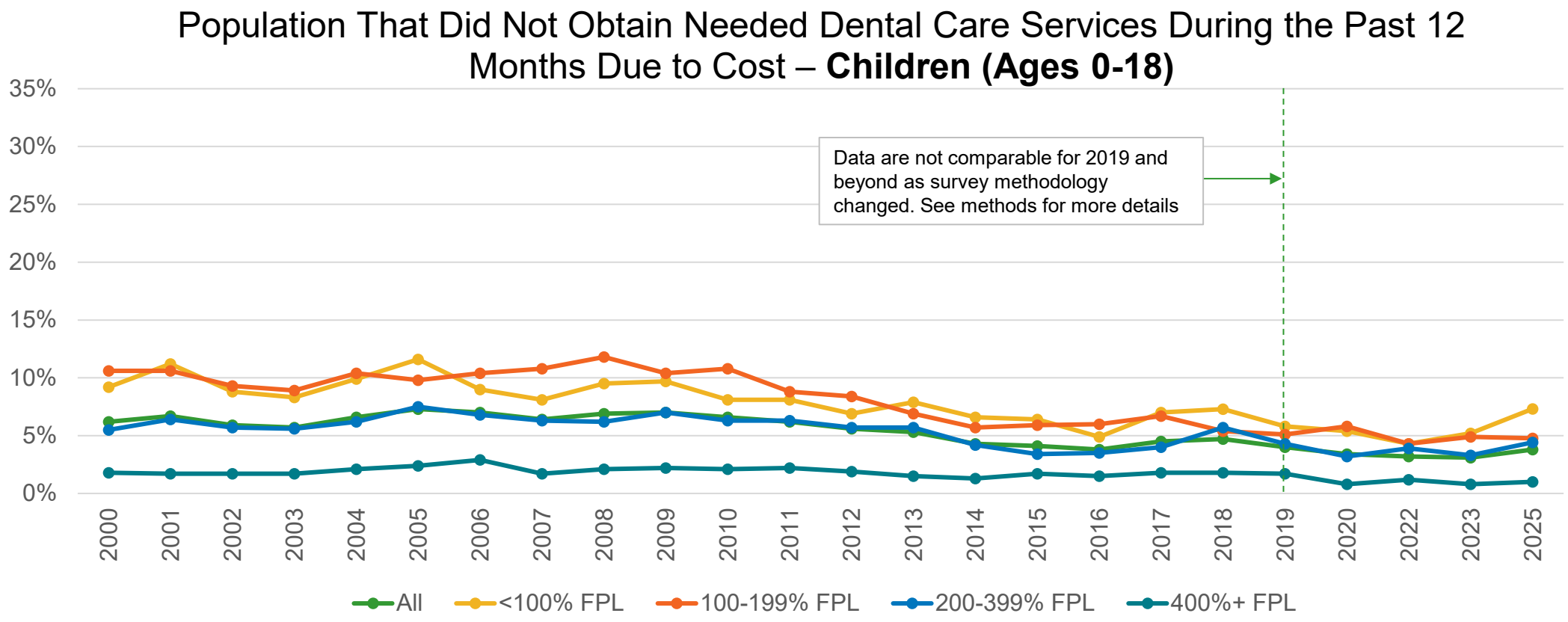
Cost Barriers to Care by Age and Income Level



Source: National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)

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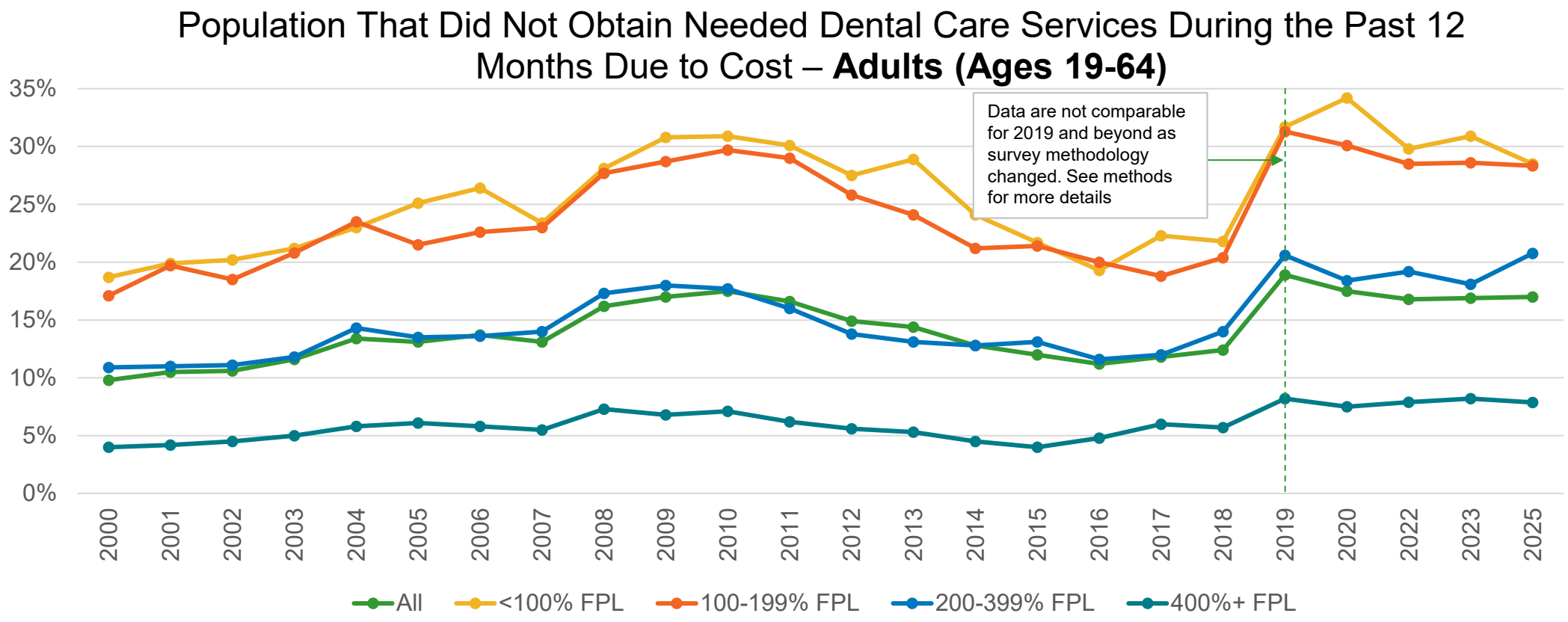
Cost Barriers to Care by Age and Income Level



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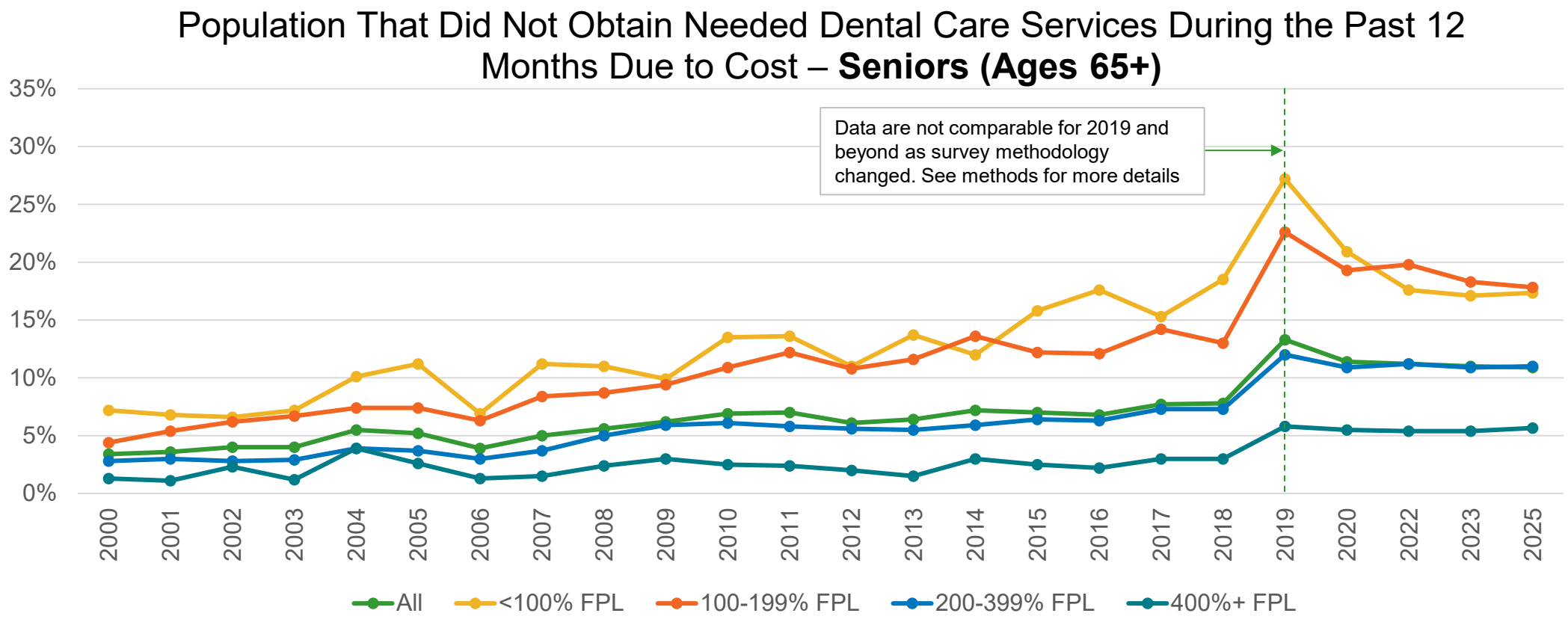
Cost Barriers to Care by Age and Income Level



Source: National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)

HPI Health Policy Institute

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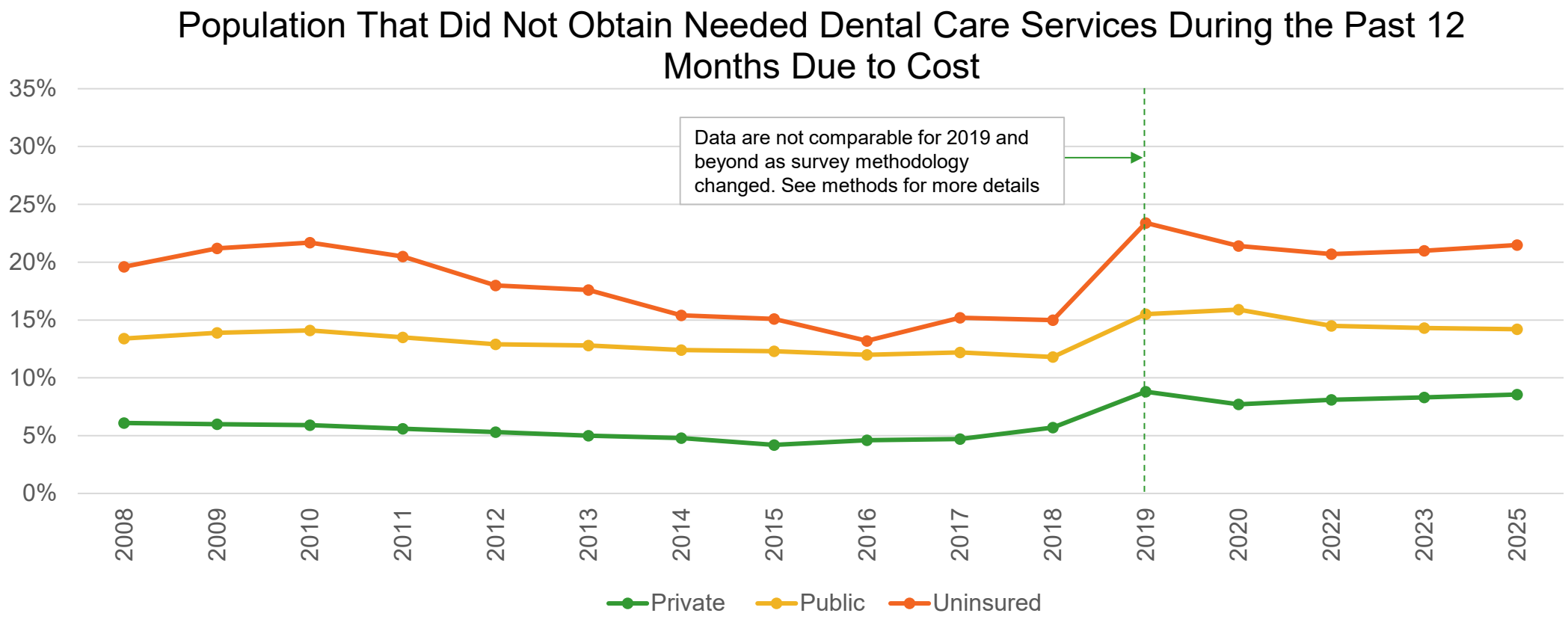
Cost Barriers to Care by Insurance Type



Source: National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)

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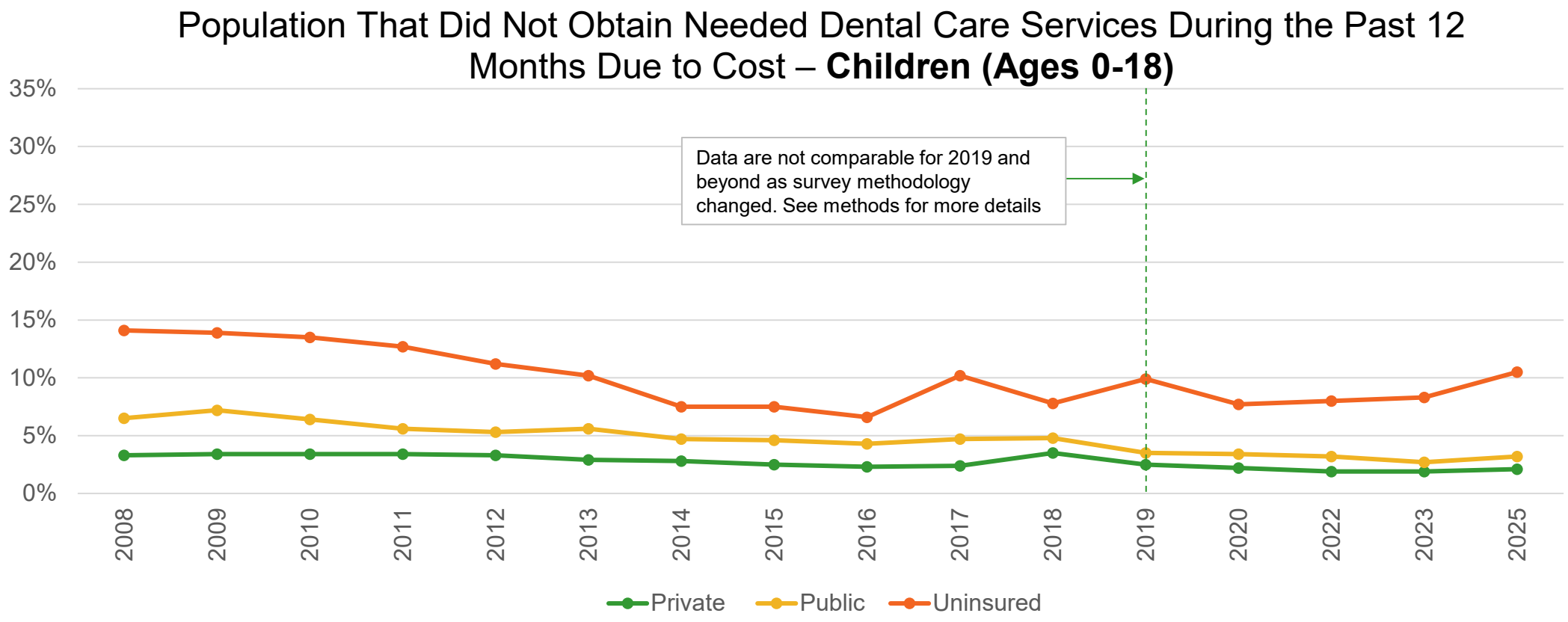
Cost Barriers to Care by Age and Insurance Type



Source: National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)

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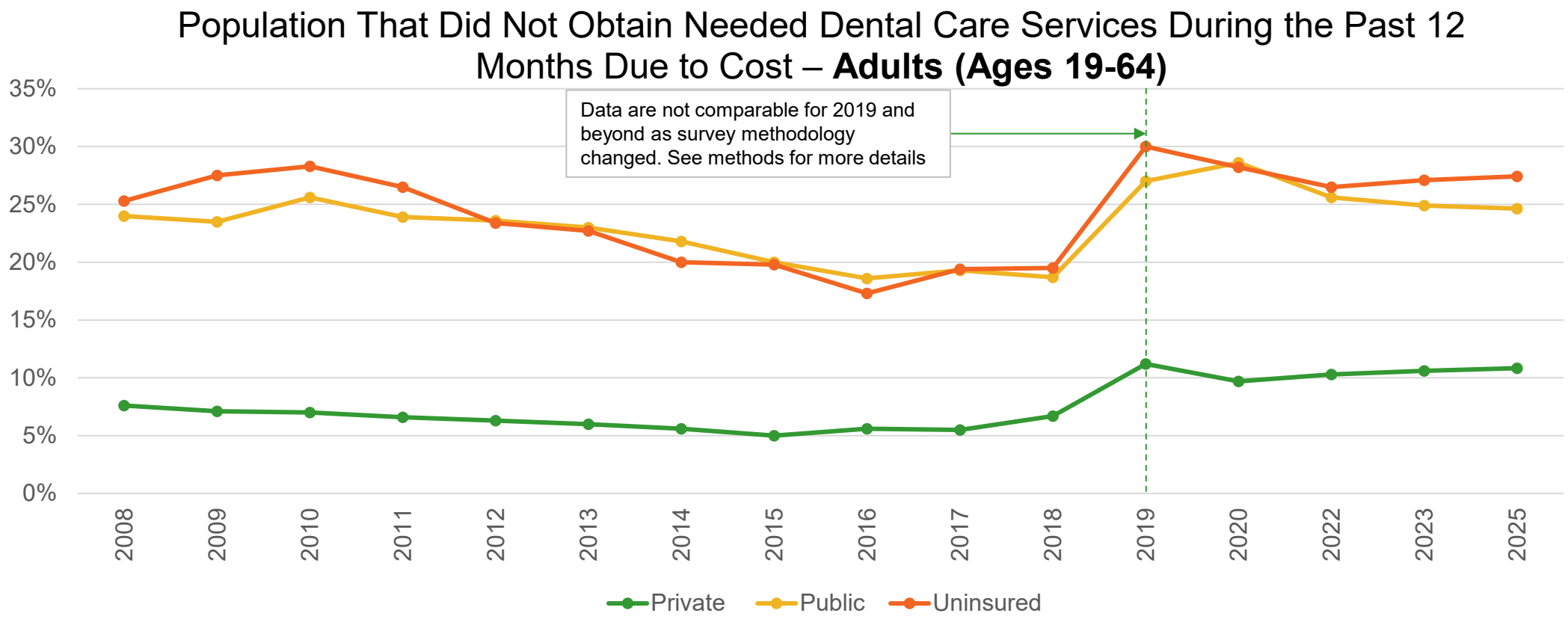
Cost Barriers to Care by Age and Insurance Type



Source: National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)

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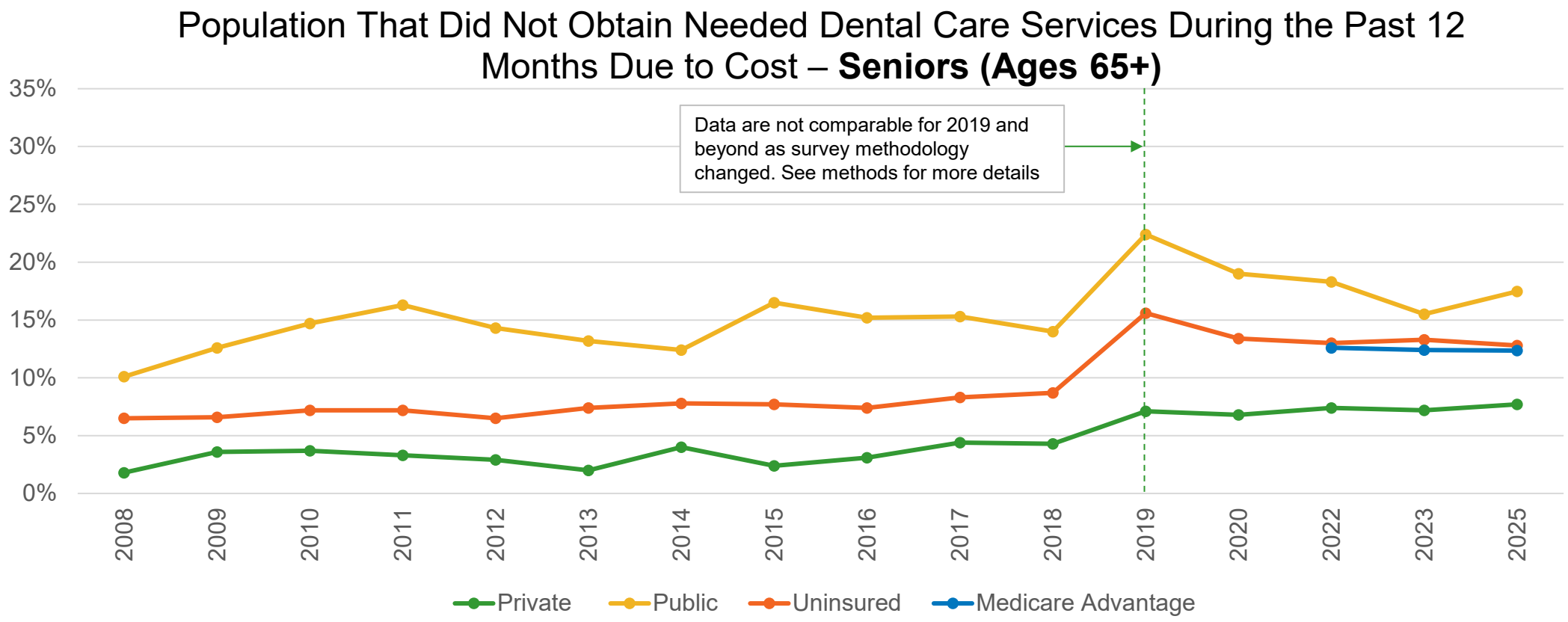
Cost Barriers to Care by Age and Insurance Type



Source: National Health Interview Survey (NHIS)

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Thank you!

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Data Sources and Methods

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Data Sources and Methods

Dental Care Utilization and Dental Insurance Coverage

Slides 5-18, 21-33

Source: Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS), 2002-2024.

Notes for Slides 5-18: Dental care utilization reflects the proportion of the U.S. population who visited any general practitioner or specialist dentist in the year, the most basic indicator of dental care utilization.

Notes for Slides 21-33: Public insurance includes those provided by Medicaid or State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

See our Data & Methods document for further details.

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Data Sources and Methods

Cost Barriers to Health Care

Slides 36-51

Source: National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), 2002-2025.

Notes: Beginning in 2019, the NHIS changed the question relating to cost barriers to health care, which we denote with a dotted line in the applicable charts. Trends can be analyzed pre-2019 and then separately for 2019 and beyond but not across 2019. Additionally, data were not available for dental services in 2021 and 2024. NHIS stopped asking about cost barriers to prescription eyeglasses in 2019.

See our Data & Methods document for further details.

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