

# Expanding Oral Health Access in Indian Country

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# Our Mission:

The **Pew Children's Dental Campaign** strives for cost-effective policies that will mean millions more children get the basic dental care they need to grow, learn, and lead healthy lives.

# Pew's Approach



# What is advocacy?

## **Advocating can take many forms:**

- Local, state, and federal
- Meeting with legislators and executive branch
- Phone calls, emails, writing letters
- Organizing coalitions and other advocates

# What is advocacy?

## **Advocacy, in all its forms, helps ensure:**

- Have your voice heard on issues important to you
- Defend and safeguard your rights
- Legislators are educated on the issues affecting their constituents
- Your views are considered when decisions are made that affect you

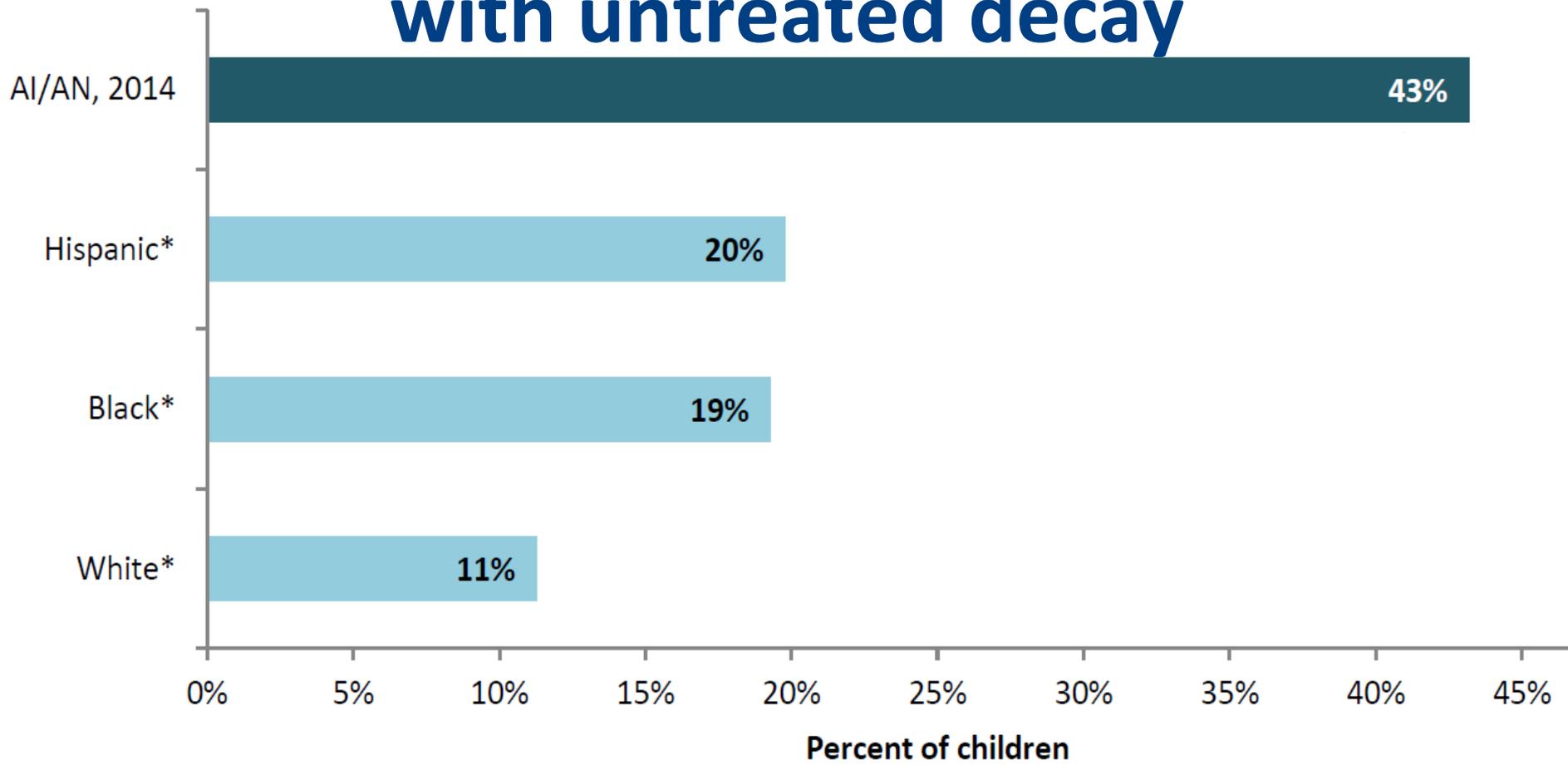
# Advocating for oral health is essential

- **Oral health crisis in Indian Country**
- Lack of resources available
- Barriers to accessing care

Tooth decay remains  
the **most common**  
chronic childhood  
disease and it  
**disproportionately**  
affects **AI/AN** families

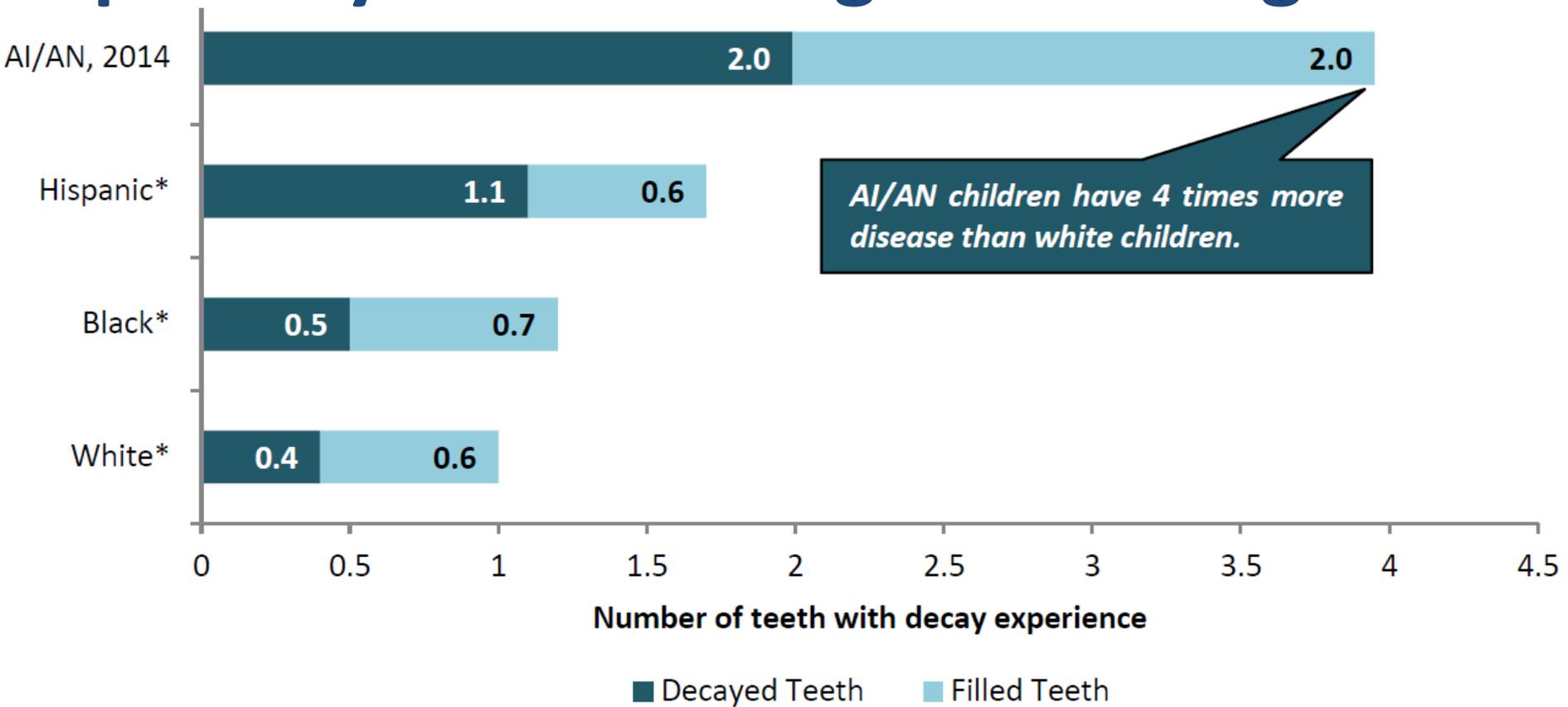


# Percent of children age 3-5 with untreated decay



\* Data Source: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 2009-2010

# Mean number of decayed and filled primary teeth among children age 2-5



\* Data Source: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1999-2002

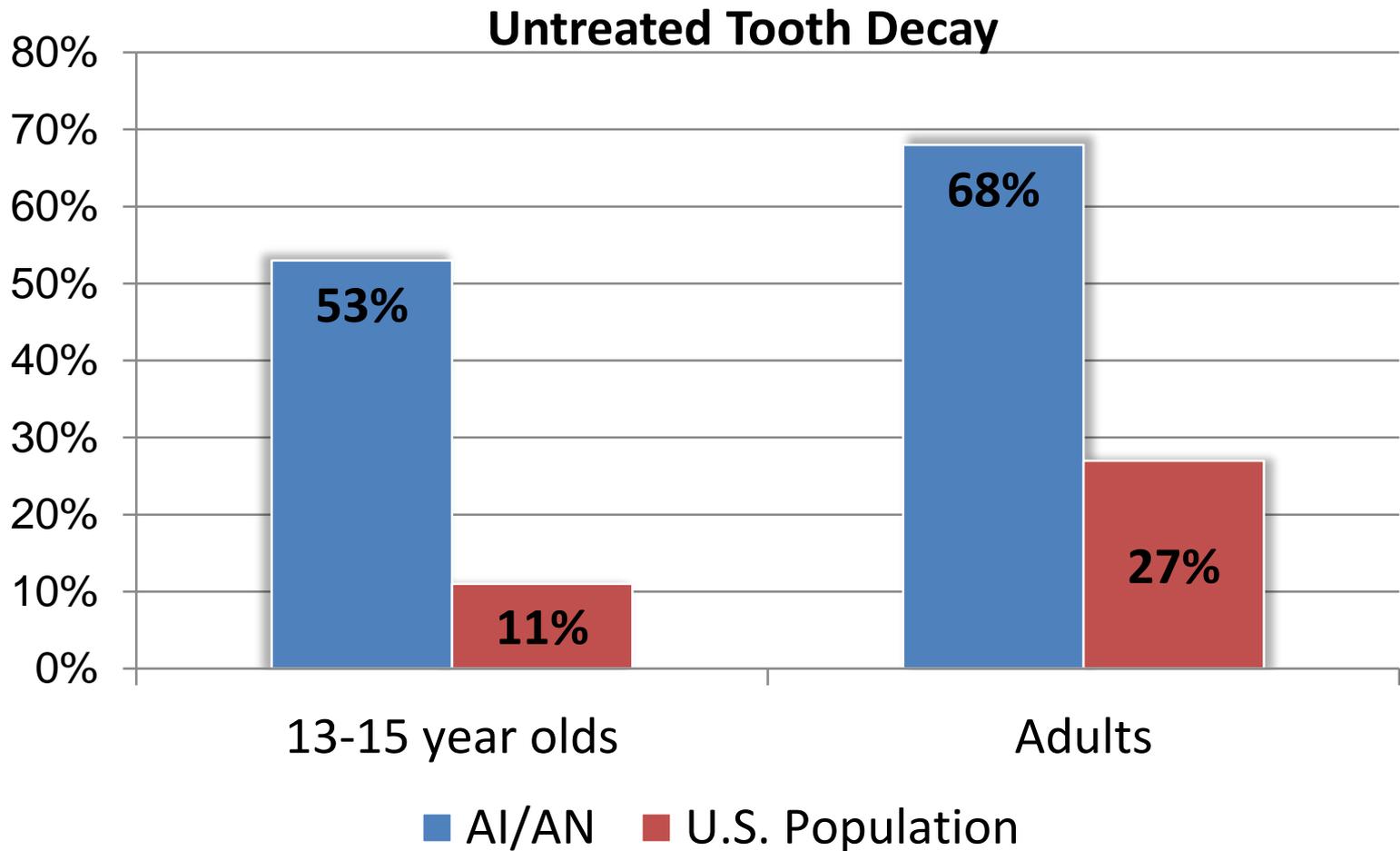
# Oral Health Disparities in Indian Country: Urgent Need, Expensive Care

More than **1 of 3** children had  
an unmet need for dental care



**\$6000 per child**

# Oral Health Disparities Continue to Adulthood



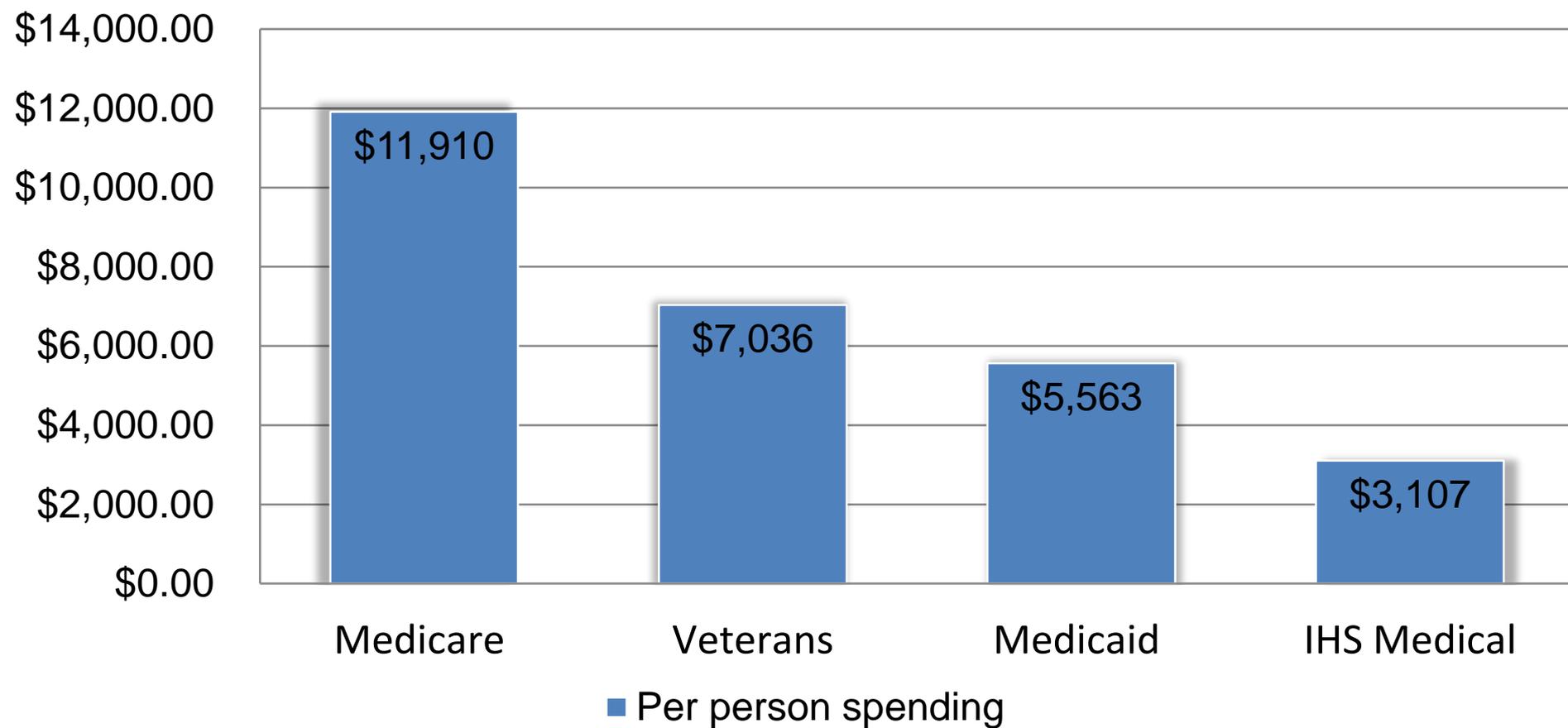
13-15 year olds: AI/AN data from 2013-2014. U.S. population from 2009-2010.  
Adults: AI/AN represents 35-44 year olds in 1999. U.S. population from 2011-2012.

# Advocating for oral health is essential

- Oral health crisis in Indian Country
- **Lack of resources available**
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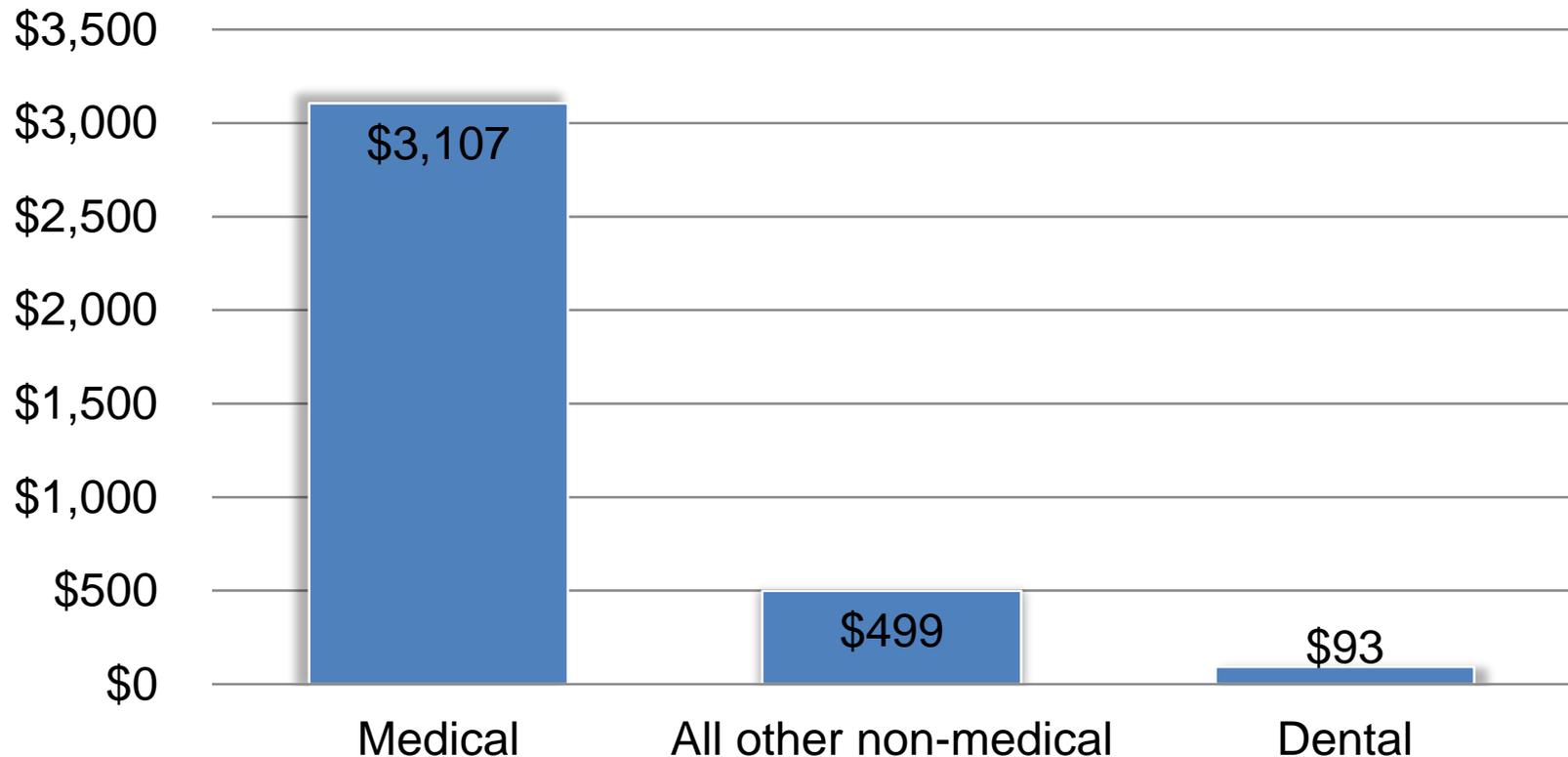
# Lack of Resources for AI/AN Oral Health

## Per person spending



# Lack of Resources for AI/AN Oral Health

## IHS spending per person





# Advocating for oral health is essential

- Oral health crisis in Indian Country
- Lack of resources available
- **Barriers to accessing care**

# Barriers to Accessing Oral Health

- Lack of oral health education
- Limited preventive dental services
- Nutrition and behavior
- Weak dental safety net
- Too few providers accepting Medicaid patients
- Affordability

# Barriers to Accessing Oral Health for AI/AN people

- Geographic isolation
- Long distances between providers
- Limited services available
- Long waits and complicated scheduling procedures



# Dentist Shortages in Indian Country

- In 2014, more than **2.4 million AI/AN people** lived in counties with dental care shortage areas
  - **Including half of all AI/AN children**



**Advocacy for Dental Health Aide  
Therapists: a Native Solution  
to Oral Health Crisis**

# Dental Health Aide Therapists

<b>Education</b>	2 years training, 3-month internship
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<b>Regulation</b>	Certified in Alaska
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<b>Supervision</b>	Remote/general supervision by dentists
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**Proven model:** many studies and decade of experience supporting safety, quality and return on investment

# DHAT Safety and Effectiveness

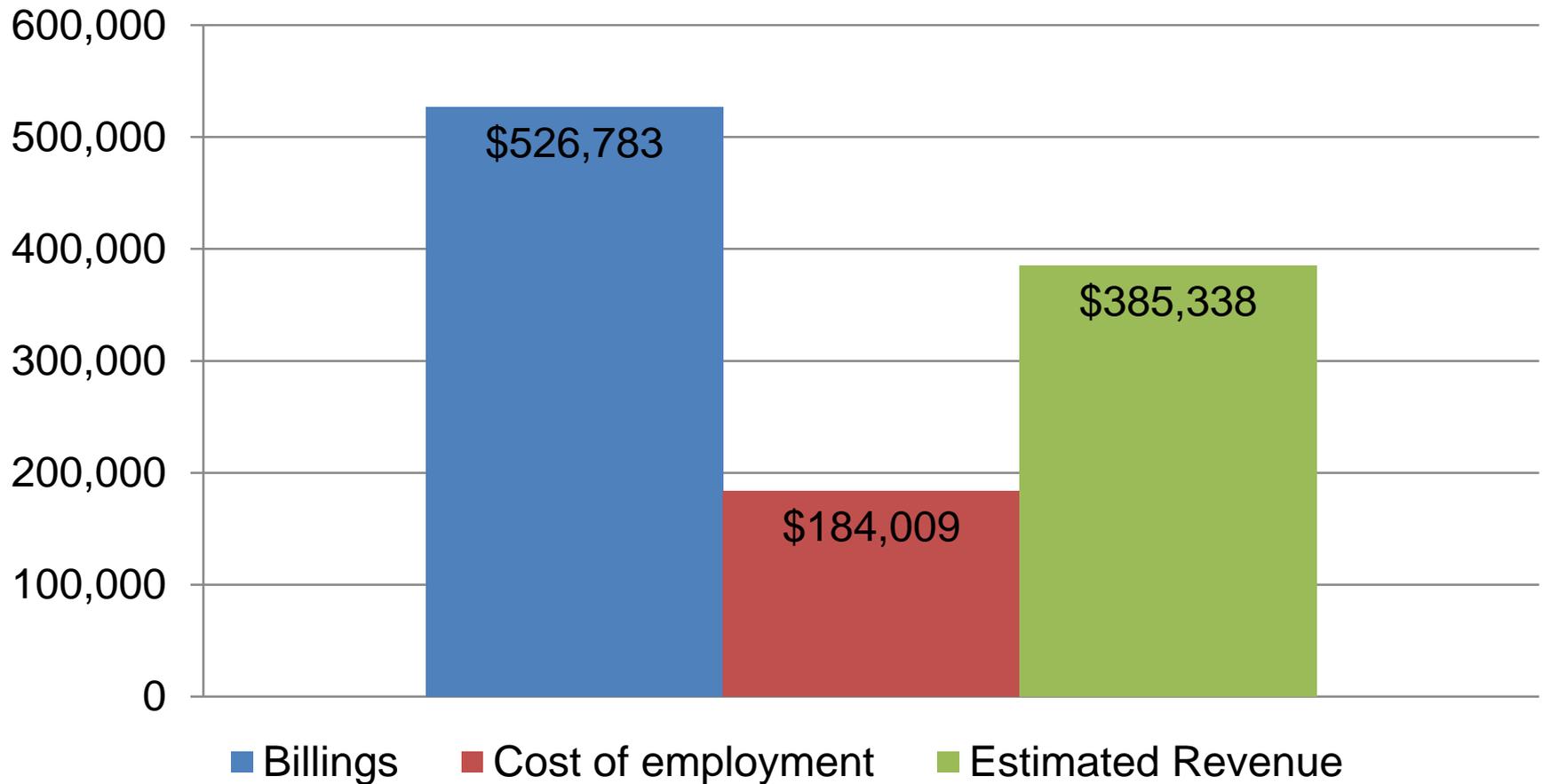
- More than **40,000 people** living in **81 previously unserved communities** now have regular access to dental care
- **No malpractice claims** have ever been filed



## DHAT Economic Benefits

- Because DHATs perform only a small number of procedures, they earn lower salaries than dentists
  - Allows tribal dental clinics to care for more patients at a lower cost
- Dentists can focus their time and skills on the most complex needs and procedures
- Provide personal economic benefits

# DHAT Economic Benefits: Case Study



# Why advocate for DHATs?

- Serious **oral health problems** need to be addressed
- DHATs are an effective solution, but legal **barriers** prevent expanding their use
- Legislators **rely on people like you** for information and support
- **You are the experts** on what Indian country needs

# Why advocate for DHATs?

- Serious **oral health problems** need to be addressed

**Solutions to these problems will**

- DHATs are an effective solution, but legal **barriers** prevent expanding their use

**not happen without citizen**

- Legislators **rely on people like you** for information and support

**engagement and advocacy**

- **You are the experts** on what Indian country needs

**“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”**

***-Margaret Mead***





**Thank you!**  
**Questions?**

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**Learn more at [pewtrusts.org/dental](https://pewtrusts.org/dental)**