



January 30, 2023

To: Senate Health Care Committee
From: Our Children Oregon, The Children's Agenda
RE: Support of SB 487, Strengthen Oral Health Care Coordination

Dear Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and Members of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon (OCO) is a statewide organization that advances equitable policies, data and research, and whole-child advocacy. The Children's Agenda, convened by OCO, brings together ~127 organizations statewide to create a holistic legislative agenda dedicated to improving the well-being of Oregon's children, youth, and families. Our collective created a 2023 legislative agenda that focuses on community-driven solutions to provide access and opportunities for all children and families. In 2021, increasing school-based oral health access was a part of the 2021 Children's Agenda, and we are returning again by supporting SB 487 to support growing the capacity and coordination of community dental health programs.

While Oregon has made great progress to ensure children have access to oral health, including implementing School Dental Screening and Sealant Programs, there is still work to be done to strengthen oral health care coordination. There are still many real barriers keeping families from getting quality dental care that children need in order to be healthy and thrive in school. Children of color, children from rural communities, and low-income children across the state are especially impacted the most by gaps in dental care access.

- Children suffering from dental disease are more likely to miss school and have lower grades, putting their economic futures at risk.
- According to the 2017 Oregon Smile Survey, dental health inequities still exist for many children in Oregon, with children of color at higher risk for cavities, particularly for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (72%), Latinx (64%), and Native American (55%) populations.¹
- In Oregon, 68 percent of children living in low-income communities have tooth decay compared with 44 percent of those in higher-income areas.²
- Children in grades 1-3 in rural areas were 11 percent more likely to have cavities than children in urban areas.³

¹ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2019/1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/207819>

² <https://healthyteethoregon.org/>

³ <https://healthyteethoregon.org/>

School-based programs need coordination to ensure children are connected with care and to remove barriers to seeking it. SB 487 will allocate funding to School Dental Screening and Sealant Programs to hire a half-time coordinator, helping provide more capacity and coordination. The bill will also provide training and employment of community dental health coordinators, a new type of non-clinical dental professional who helps people from underserved communities overcome barriers.

Beyond schools, many people face language and cultural barriers, lack insurance coverage, transportation, or childcare needed to visit a dentist. These barriers can be overcome when dental care coordination is in place, ensuring healthy teeth and essential care for Oregon's children. We thank you for your time and efforts to improve child well-being across the state. We urge you to support SB 487 to ensure that all children in Oregon have access to oral health services.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

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View the 2023 Children's Agenda at www.ourchildrenoregon.org/2023-childrens-agenda