



2023 Dental Workforce Budget Request

HB 2979/SB 441

Oregon is experiencing a critical shortage of dental assistants and hygienists, vital oral health care providers. Without enough auxiliary staff, dentists are forced to cut back their hours and the number of patients they serve, reducing access to care. This isn't a new problem, but it has been greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021, the Oregon Employment Department identified dental assisting as one of the most challenging roles to fill among vacant health care jobs. Of all health care providers, dental offices lost the largest proportion of staff in the early months of the pandemic, according to the Oregon Health Authority's 2021 Health Care Workforce Report. Data released in 2022 found that 9 percent of Oregon's 5,480 dental assistant positions remain vacant.

The Oregon Dental Association is collaborating with education, government, and other partners to address this crisis. Together, we are pursuing short- and long-term solutions that will help to resolve urgent workforce needs, expand access to care for underserved Oregonians and improve diversity of the dental care workforce. We believe it is a critical time for the Oregon Legislature to invest in oral health across the state.

Community College Dental Assisting and Hygiene Programs: \$5 million investment

Funds allocated to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission would be administered to the dental assisting and hygiene training programs at Community Colleges across the state to increase enrollment, support recruitment and retention of instructors and provide scholarships for students from diverse populations.

High School Health Professional Programs: \$5 million investment

Funding provided to the Oregon Department of Education would support the expansion of K-12 health professional career and technical education in Oregon high schools, increasing the pipeline of future dental assistants and hygienists.

Workforce Development Incentives: \$7 million investment

Additional funding allocated to the Oregon Health Authority would enable the expansion of Oregon's Health Care Provider Incentive Programs to include all oral health professionals (dentists, hygienists, assistants, dental therapists, dental community health aides) working in priority communities, increasing access to care for tribal, rural, low-income, and other underserved populations while supporting recruitment and retention of critically needed dental care providers. Funds would be available for providers, FQHCs, and employers serving Medicaid patients.

Tribal Dental Professions Education: \$1 million investment

Funds provided to a tribal entity for the creation of a dental professions education program to support the administration of programs for tribal youth to learn about and become interested in dental professions.

Dental Assisting Training Module Development: \$2 million investment

Funds allocated to a workforce board for the creation of a chair side dental assisting training module to be made available to all providers across the state.

Partners in support of this package:



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