

**REPORT OF PRESIDENT**

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Mr. Speaker, Fellow Leaders, Colleagues, and Distinguished Guests...

As I began every Board meeting this year—and the Trustees will appreciate this—it’s showtime!

I started my term as the American Dental Association’s 159<sup>th</sup> president with a personal vow. I was determined to put my heart and soul into giving back to this profession... to this community whose generosity has enriched my life and whose excellence has inspired me to be the very best I could be.

And yet, as I’ve worked hard to give back to you, you have given me even more to be proud of and uplifted by.

Like in February, when I attended the 21st anniversary kick off of Give Kids A Smile in St. Louis. I offered thanks and encouragement to the nearly 350 volunteers, including dentists, dental hygienists, dental residents, and team members.

In the clinic, the children couldn’t wait to show off their newly restored smiles to their parents, whose faces were filled with relief and gratitude. For me, after 46 years as a dentist, that moment never gets old.

Moments like these reflect the heart of dentistry.

I was touched knowing that dentists across our association in some way contribute to moments like this every day, whether in other large volunteer settings or in one-on-one appointments in dental offices and community clinics.

Just consider the many ways our contributions show up...

Through the scientific evidence upon which our profession is based...  
Through the education that cultivates our expertise...  
Through the instruments, equipment, and technologies that enable our work...  
Through the planning, preparation, and focus that make it possible...  
Through the decisions that are made, the resources that are developed, and the obstacles that are alleviated by the very leaders here today...

My experience at Give Kids a Smile is just one example of the unique gift this presidency has granted me: The chance to see the dots connect for the ADA.

In addition to seeing the large-scale impact we all make on public health, I’ve had the privilege and responsibility of getting to know our nation’s dental professionals in a more up-close-and-personal way than I ever could before.

Not only did I attend council, committee, task force, and work group meetings, I travelled to your districts and states, universities and research labs, clinics and conferences, manufacturing facilities and practices, both large and small.

I’ve seen firsthand the end-to-end process by which your innovation, commitment, service, and vision yield positive change for other human beings, whether they too are dentists or those whose lives are made better, whose health is improved, because of what our community provides.

It’s astounding to see just how our contributions are strengthened and magnified when they come together, when our talents converge to give others the treasure of good oral health.

In dentistry, unity is our essential asset.

The same is true for our American Dental Association.

1 Today, I'm pleased to provide an account of our successes from the last year. They are a result of,  
2 among many things, daring leadership and the unity that amplifies our impact.

3 Let's just say we started the leadership year off with a bang.

4 On November 8<sup>th</sup> of last year, a pivotal victory in dental insurance reform saw 72% of Massachusetts  
5 voters approve a medical loss ratio for dental plans, effective 2024, directing 83% of premiums to patient  
6 care. This success has inspired similar legislation nationwide, with ADA and 13 state dental societies  
7 collaborating on medical loss ratio bills in 2023.

8 More than 80 percent of dentists would likely participate on state-level grassroots campaigns about  
9 medical loss ratios for dental plans.

10 The Massachusetts insurance reform journey is a testament to grassroots success and how the power of  
11 a single voice, a single decision, and a single action can spur much-needed progress for all.

12 It began with a passionate Massachusetts dentist, Dr. Mouhab Rizkallah, who authored the ballot  
13 measure, then formed a committee of dentists and patients. The effort garnered support from the  
14 Massachusetts Dental Society, who—with partnership from the ADA—formed the Massachusetts Dental  
15 Care Providers for Better Dental Benefits committee.

16 All told, the ADA, individual dentists, state dental societies, and other healthcare organizations donated  
17 over \$7 million to educate Massachusetts residents and promote the initiative.

18 On Election Day, I joined Mass Dental leaders in visiting polling sites and celebrating the victory with  
19 dental students in Boston.

20 It was important to celebrate that moment with dental students, as our work to improve the dental benefits  
21 system is as much about them as it is about today's patients and professionals.

22 These rising stars deserve a future where they can treat patients without insurer interference, and where  
23 patients have seamless access to the adequate, quality dental care that they—and all of us—will provide.

24 And this is why the ADA's overall efforts on dental insurance reform continue.

25 As you know, changes to the dental benefits system often occur on the state level, so local advocacy is  
26 critically important.

27 It's a cause taken up by the ADA's State Public Affairs program—also known as SPA—which aids  
28 constituent societies with policy development and grants to drive legislative and regulatory changes and  
29 keep dental insurance reform moving along. In fact, just this year, SPA spent \$3 million supporting state  
30 societies in their advocacy efforts.

31 From 2018 to 2023, with the help of the SPA program, state dental societies have successfully supported  
32 149 new laws that have tipped the scales in favor of patients and dentists. There are now at least 248  
33 Dental Insurance Reform state laws on the books across the country.

34 Additionally, in our work to improve health equity, ADA advocacy has secured state-level improvements  
35 to Medicaid, along with an extension of federal funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program.

36 Federally, the ADA is asking for Congress' support to enhance adult access to Medicaid dental benefits  
37 and to remove barriers for dentists who want to participate in the program. We're also working to create  
38 greater transparency on ERISA plans for patients and providers.

1 At last year's House meeting, I expressed my confidence in our ability to transform the dental benefits  
2 system into one that is truly beneficial for all. And with small steps and gigantic leaps, we're making  
3 progress on what most dentists consider their biggest challenge.

4 We're making strides on workforce shortages, which are the second most-common pain point. Staff  
5 vacancies are among the reasons dental practice schedules are not reaching full capacity.

6 HPI finds that more than one-third of dentists struggle to recruit dental hygienists and assistants.  
7 Understaffed dental practices simply cannot perform at their highest potential.

8 Strengthening the workforce pipeline requires comprehensive solutions, and states in our tripartite are  
9 taking action – like streamlining in-office training for assistants, running recruitment campaigns for high  
10 school graduates, and funding efforts for education programs that also incentivize service in underserved  
11 communities.

12 At the federal level, the ADA supports the reauthorization of the Action for Dental Health Act and  
13 increased funding for the Oral Health Workforce Improvement Grant Program.

14 I spoke with Senator Bernie Sanders, chair of the Senate's Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions  
15 committee, earlier this year about the impact of workforce shortages on healthcare access. The HELP  
16 Committee, along with many other lawmakers, is dedicated to finding solutions.

17 On September 21st, the committee passed the Bipartisan Primary Care and Workforce Act, which—  
18 among other things— reauthorizes workforce grants toward oral health training programs, in addition to  
19 extending community health centers, which provide quality dental care to underserved communities.

20 As a long-time supporter of licensure portability, the ADA also promotes workforce mobility through the  
21 Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact—in collaboration with the Council of State Governments. The  
22 compact simplifies multistate practice by standardizing credentials across participating states.

23 Washington, Iowa, and Tennessee have enacted the compact, with active bills in New Jersey, Ohio,  
24 Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin soon introducing it. Ten more states have stated their interest in introducing  
25 the compact next year.

26 In addition to meeting practical needs, succeeding in this endeavor, and in all we do at the American  
27 Dental Association, is about empowering dental professionals to experience freedom and ease as they  
28 design their lives and careers.

29 It's about empowering them to be their best... to fulfill the highest expression of themselves as agents of  
30 health and wellbeing.

31 When it comes to the ADA, the key to fulfilling the highest expression of our organization is boldness.  
32 Last year, I shared with you my desire for our Association to take a bolder stand for optimal overall health  
33 and becoming a more prominent voice in health care at large.

34 This year, I'm happy to report that our leadership is gaining recognition.

35 In July, I participated on a panel hosted by the National Council on Disability, highlighting dental-medical  
36 collaboration as a means for reducing health disparities among people with disabilities. The ADA's work  
37 for vulnerable communities was recognized along with CODA's accreditation standards, which require  
38 dental school graduates to be competent in assessing and managing the treatment of patients with  
39 special needs. The group also recognized the ADA for specifying in its professional code of conduct that  
40 dentists should not deny dental care to patients because of a patient's disability.

1 Last month, I represented the ADA in Washington, D.C. at a White House Briefing on building healthy  
2 communities, my second invitation from the Biden Administration after attending the White House  
3 Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in March.

4 At both sessions, health care thought leaders were urged to act on issues like reducing diet-related  
5 diseases. I am proud that the ADA has made moves in that direction, with the work of its Task Force on  
6 Sugar, Nutrition, and Diet.

7 Dentistry has long been at the forefront of disease prevention and treatment, and as the ADA aims for  
8 optimal health for all, whole-body health — alongside oral health — is an area of focus.

9 Recognizing nutrition's impact on oral and systemic health—as we have done with tobacco products, for  
10 example—is a vital next step in that pursuit.

11 The Task Force began by reviewing ADA's diet and nutrition policies, then proposed policy  
12 recommendations and next steps.

13 The Task Force continues in 2024, and we look forward to further professional education on nutrition  
14 screenings during dental visits, the exploration of science-based guidance of sugar's impact on oral  
15 health outcomes, and plans for public awareness on added sugar consumption.

16 Although, much to my chagrin, the March White House Conference did not mention sugar and caries as  
17 much as I would have liked, the very invitation to be there was the start of an ongoing conversation to  
18 drive action.

19 The ADA has earned its seat at the table. And we will continue to take a bold stand for oral health's  
20 integral role in overall wellbeing... not just for the prevention and treatment of disease, but the promotion  
21 of health as well.

22 And we are also being bold within our Association... by becoming more future-focused, kicking off a  
23 much-needed transformation to the ADA's business, governance, and membership models. That's huge –  
24 it's what you've been asking for.

25 Under the guidance of our Executive Director Dr. Raymond Cohlma, we have accomplished a great deal  
26 in an accelerated timeframe from debuting the ADA Member App to forming our strategic forecasting  
27 committee.

28 More milestones lie ahead, like the July 2024 transition to Salesforce/Fonteva, our new association  
29 management system. And even more member value is on the way: In 2025, a new membership model  
30 will help dentists connect to the benefits best suited to their needs.

31 When it comes to innovation at the ADA, there is so much to be energized about, and we're getting things  
32 done.

33 That's what boldness gets us—results.

34 With the ADA professional team now working a hybrid schedule, the ADA is also exploring options for its  
35 Chicago headquarters building. Creating collaborative meeting space for staff would require costly  
36 renovations, as would the development of space for potential tenants, whose occupancy would further  
37 maximize the use of our headquarters offices.

38 As initial analysis got underway, we received an unsolicited inquiry from an entity interested in buying the  
39 building. The ADA continues to assess its real estate needs and is exploring its options for the future. No  
40 final plans have been made, and discussions are ongoing. The Board of Trustees will approve any  
41 decision that involves a transaction or major renovation.

1 In the last year, I've also found that boldness does not always begin with ferocious resolve. Instead, it's  
2 often an outcome of a crystal-clear purpose—identified by asking and answering the simple question of  
3 why.

4 As leaders, why have we all made the individual and collective commitment to serve the public, the  
5 profession, and all ADA members? Why are we here today?

6 Why does the ADA exist? And why should anyone care?

7 Because we make people healthy.

8 Last winter, the Board of Trustees adopted “We make people healthy” as the strategic why that works  
9 alongside the Association’s mission and vision.

10 This House will review all three statements, and your decision to keep, revise, or replace them will lay the  
11 foundation for our Association’s future.

12 In my view, our strategic why offers a common ground to everyone who agrees that dentists make people  
13 healthy, and that, as essential health care, dentistry is necessary for a healthy society.

14 Despite this, our “whats” and our “hows” are as diverse as our backgrounds, perspectives, and modalities  
15 of service.

16 As leaders, we know that there are often many ways for the ADA to express its purpose, and there is not  
17 always a single right answer. We may disagree on actions and approaches.

18 And yet we remain committed, returning year after year to conference calls and meetings... to  
19 understand... to debate... to defend... and to decide.

20 Because we have the gift of unity...  
21 ...which does not mean sameness, but oneness of purpose.

22 We remain committed because “We make people healthy” reflects what we all believe in: ...our capacity  
23 to make things better for those who believe in us.

24 I'd like to close with a quote from the late poet Gwendolyn Brooks.

25 “We are each other’s harvest; we are each other’s business; we are each other’s magnitude and bond.”

26 Over the last 12 months, we have proven our collective power. It radiates from beyond the four walls of  
27 the ADA into real solutions that make a mark on the world... for people whose names we may never  
28 know, but whose lives and careers have seen positive improvements because of those of us in this room.

29 When it comes to the success of our profession, the health of our patients and the public, the elevation  
30 and advancement of dentistry...

31 When it comes to fostering an inclusive community that embraces professionals of all backgrounds and  
32 practice modalities...

33 Our differences offer us little distinction.

34 We are each other’s business. We must always remember that we are each other’s harvest.

35 In unity, our possibilities and destinies are intertwined.

1 In unity, the threads of our individual contributions are woven together to create a large tapestry... to  
2 create a new thing whose strength and beauty is only made possible by being each other's magnitude  
3 and bond.

4 So as my term as ADA president ends, I ask that you always remember to tap into our collective power as  
5 we look ahead to the opportunities that remain.

6 To be bold in designing a health care system that works. Even if it means disrupting the status quo,  
7 rejecting current options, and creating a new thing.

8 To be daring as we set the global standard for oral health.

9 To be fearless in our calling to make people healthy.

10 Who says we can't?  
11 Who better than us to try?  
12 And how else to do it... but together.

13 Because in unity... where one thrives, we all thrive.

14 Leading the American Dental Association this year has been a great honor, and I owe much of it to the  
15 support of my wife Ellen, our children, and grandchildren. Thank you.

16 Thank you to the ADA Board of Trustees for their collaboration and dedicated service.

17 To the ADA professional team, led by Dr. Ray Cohlma, whose vision and energy wowed me daily. Both  
18 he and President-elect Dr. Linda Edgar are friends and confidantes who have had my back this year.  
19 Thank you.

20 I extend my appreciation to all ADA volunteers, including all of you, who exemplify what it means to be  
21 agents of change. A special thanks to my home base, the Baltimore City Dental Society, the Maryland  
22 State Dental Association, and the fighting Fourth District for their unwavering support over the years.

23 Saying farewell is bittersweet. I'm humbled and fortunate to have served as your president. I am forever  
24 grateful for the opportunity, and most importantly, for the ways you will all help dentistry and the ADA  
25 thrive for generations to come.

26 Thank you!