



# Emerging and Current Models to Address Dental Team Workforce Activities by State

## Intro

Lack of a fully staffed dental team impacts patient access, unevenly redistributes responsibilities within the existing team, and leads to exacerbation of stressors on dental professionals and operation of the dental clinic. Despite variation in education and licensing requirements, there is uniformity among states in prioritizing workforce. This list provides examples of creative models of addressing the shortage of allied dental team members. Leadership of every State Dental Association has access to the most current and comprehensive resources on strategy and legislative tactics in the [ADA Workforce Toolkit](#) available on Connect. If you do not have access, please contact your State Dental Associations directly. If you would like to feature your state effort please email [dentalpractice@ada.org](mailto:dentalpractice@ada.org).

## Supervision and Scope at a Glance by State

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### HYGIENIST SUPERVISION

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Alabama and Mississippi are the only two states remaining that require direct supervision for hygienists regardless of the procedure they are performing.

In 2024, state legislatures have removed some restrictions on hygienist supervision. South Dakota removed a provision requiring recent active practice on the part of the hygienist before they can enter collaborative supervision. Tennessee increased the number of hygienists a dentist may supervise to five. A pending bill in Virginia would allow a hygienist to treat a patient under remote supervision for 180 days before requiring the patient to be seen by a dentist (currently, the law allows this for 90 days).

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### DENTAL ASSISTANT SUPERVISION

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A bill introduced in Washington, DC would, if passed, allow hygienists to supervise dental assistants for certain functions.

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### LOCAL ANESTHESIA

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10 states allow hygienists to administer local anesthesia under general supervision: Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Minnesota, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington

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### CORONAL POLISHING

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41 states allow dental assistants (of varying levels and qualifications) to perform coronal polishing; 16 states have requirements specific to coronal polishing: Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia.



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## EXPANDED FUNCTION DENTAL ASSISTANT (EFDA)

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Having been around for two decades, the Expanded Function Dental Assistant, can in some states perform, with additional training, more procedures than the standard scope of a noncertified assistant such as scanning, final impression, prosthesis adjustment, placing cord, placing restorations and cementing crowns,

Some states have a variation of an EFDA with additional certification to be a Restorative Dental Assistant or a Certified Orthodontic Assistant.

Two states, Wisconsin and Maryland, saw new laws allowing EFDA's to practice signed in the 2021-22 session, bringing the total number of states with these laws to 32.

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## ORAL PREVENTATIVE ASSISTANT (OPA)

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An Oral Preventative Assistant is a type of Expanded Function Dental Assistant (EFDA) who has taken the required education and completed training to provide patients with additional preventive services and can assist hygienists with preventive care practices. OPAs will remove hard build up on visible, healthy teeth or on patients with reversible gum inflammation.

In 2023, Missouri Dental Association began working with the Missouri Dental Board on rules for a short-term pilot program to evaluate the safety of this type of scaling assistant. The MDA worked to identify the specific needs of patients in Missouri and design a unique position to positively impact the oral health of underserved populations. Upon the conclusion of the pilot, the MDA may file a scaling dental assistant bill in 2024 using the data collected.

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## COMMUNITY DENTAL HEALTH COORDINATOR (CDHC)

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The Community Dental Health Coordinator works as a bridge between underserved communities in need of care and clinics or practices able to provide that care. The CDHC also works directly with the patient to ensure their treatment plan is followed, and that the patient has access to all community resources available to them, even if those are outside of dentistry, like HPV vaccination.

There are currently 21 CDHC programs around the country, with more on the way, and approximately 730 graduates. Santa Fe Community College in New Mexico recently announced the start of their program. In an incredibly exciting development, the Indian Health Service (IHS) has signed an agreement to offer CDHC training throughout the entire system, vastly increasing the number of available sites at which CDHC's can continue their valuable work.

## Model Initiatives by State

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### INCREASE TUITION WAIVERS (MARYLAND)

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In April 2023, the Maryland Legislature passed HB 290, an Oral Health Task Force Bill that included improvements to the existing Maryland Dent-Care Loan Assistance Repayment Program. The tuition waiver increased from \$23,740/year for three years up to \$50,000/year for three years. The law also made qualifying dental hygienists eligible for \$10,000/year for two years.

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## SECURE LOAN ASSISTANCE FOR THE FULL DENTAL TEAM (MAINE, FLORIDA)

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In Maine, LD 1256 expanded the Maine Dental Education Loan Program to cover hygienists, therapists, EFDAs and assistants.

Florida's SB 7016 extended Florida's Dental Student Loan Repayment Program to hygienists.

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## CREATE A RURAL PRACTICE-FOCUSED DENTAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (MISSISSIPPI, ALABAMA, WISCONSIN, MARYLAND)

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Mississippi's state legislature implemented the Mississippi Rural Dentists Scholarship Program (MRDSP) in 2013. The program provides \$35,000 in scholarships annually for no more than four years provided the students fulfill an obligation, upon completion of their education, to practice in rural Mississippi areas for a period of at least the same number of years as they received scholarships. A 2023 audit of the program found that every dentist who was currently practicing during the obligation period following their education under the program was fulfilling that obligation by practicing in a designated rural area. Mississippi increased funding for the scholarship program once more in 2023, and the funding has held steady for 2024.

In 2023, The University of Alabama also welcomed the inaugural class of its Rural Dental Scholars program. Open to Alabamans from rural areas, the postgraduate program includes a year of study and a master's degree in rural community health at University of Alabama College of Community Health Sciences, as well as early admission to the UAB School of Dentistry.

In Wisconsin, SB 706 (2024) created a Rural Scholarship at Marquette University School of Dentistry. The program provides up to \$30,000 in scholarship funds annually to up to 15 students at a time. After graduation, recipients agree to work in a Dental Health Provider Shortage Area for 18 months for each year of scholarship, or are obliged to return the funds.

In 2024, the Maryland Department of Health launched the Pathways to a Bright Future scholarship, awarded to those interested in dentistry who plan to work in one of a few designated underserved areas. Funding for this initiative comes from a four-year, \$1.6 million HRSA grant.

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## CREATE A DENTAL EDUCATION LOAN PROGRAM (ALABAMA)

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Alabama's Dental Service Program is administered by its Board of Dental Scholarship Awards, and issues need- and merit-based loans up to the price of in-state tuition and fees at its state dentistry school to dental students. Each applicant must agree to work full-time in a clinical practice as a licensed dentist in an area of critical need for a specified number of months and agree to provide care to a certain number of indigent patients or patients



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covered under Medicaid. Loans can be repaid in cash or through practice in an approved area. The program will issue a number of loans up to 20% of the state dentistry school's student population. Students can receive loans for up to four years.

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### ADVANCE A COORDINATED APPROACH TO PROMOTE HEALTH CARE CAREERS IN K-12 EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS, AND CREATE A PROGRAM TO ATTRACT STUDENTS TO THE STATE TO FINISH TRAINING (VERMONT)

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Leverage AHEC, VSAC, Vermont After School, Vermont Career and Technical Education Centers and Vocational Rehab programs to clearly document and develop a plan to actively promote health care careers in K-12 educational settings. Ensure adequate funding for AHEC and other entities conducting middle and high school health careers outreach to develop health career pipelines are inclusive of dental careers including dentist, dental hygienist, dental therapy, and dental assisting. ("Health Care Workforce Development Strategic Plan", Vermont Agency of Human Services, October 2021.)

Vermont approved \$100,000 in 2023 for its Dental Hygienist Forgivable Loan Program. Hygienists are eligible to apply for loan forgiveness if they practice in Vermont for the same number of years for which they received forgiveness and if they maintain enrollment at an eligible program.

Vermont's \$3.8 million appropriation for Critical Occupations Scholarships applies to dental hygienists, and provides funding for retraining and relocation incentives.

Additionally, Vermont is pursuing a program to attract dental students to the state to finish their training. Afterward, students are encouraged to stay and work in federally qualified health centers.

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### "INTRODUCTION TO DENTISTRY" PILOT PROGRAM (WASHINGTON STATE)

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Delta Dental of Washington (DDWA) completed an "Introduction to Dentistry" pilot program at TAF Saghalie. TAF is a problem-based school in Federal Way for 6th-12th graders. The pilot program was 4 weeks long and students met one hour per week. The pilot cohort consisted of 8-12 students from a variety of grades. Students learned about different dental professions, dental basics, and local education programs. The program aims to educate students about dental careers early on. DDWA would like to expand this program throughout Washington. Funding for the pilot program came from DDWA and WSDA dentists donated dental supplies.

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### DENTAL ASSISTING TRAINING IN HIGH SCHOOL (WASHINGTON STATE)

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Across Washington, eight skill centers have dental assisting training programs. Skill centers are regional secondary schools that serve high school students from multiple school districts. They provide instruction in preparatory programs that are either too expensive or too specialized for school districts to operate individually. The dental assisting programs are for juniors and seniors and are typically one school year long (9 months). Since the students are in high school the programs are free, with fees for supplies and equipment.



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To standardize education and training, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction adopted a dental assisting statewide framework in May 2022. The framework prepares students with an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the dental health care profession within the application of dental care. Students are eligible to earn 1.0 lab science credit that counts for graduation requirements such as biology, chemistry, and other lab sciences. The framework is 540 hours long and requires students complete 55 hours of clinical practicum or clinical simulation.

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## EXPANDING DENTAL TRAINING PROGRAMS ALONGSIDE OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONS (NEW JERSEY)

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In fall 2023, County College of Morris (CCM) announced the construction of a new facility that will function as the college's Center for Health Professions. The college will offer new programs in dental hygiene, dental assisting, surgical technology, diagnostic medical sonography and medical assistance and expanded programs in nursing, radiography, respiratory therapy, paramedic science and drug counseling.

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## FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE AT JACKSONVILLE: DENTAL ASSISTING PROGRAM (FLORIDA)

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Existing full-time 1230 clock hour to be replaced by two alternative programs:

- CWE (Continuing Workforce Education) Dental Assisting Program - a "hybrid" program that combines online and hands-on instruction, offers rapid entry into the profession for those students who need flexibility in scheduling to accommodate work or family obligations; not CODA-accredited
- ATD (Applied Technology Diploma) Dental Assisting Program - this for-credit program is designed for those students who wish to earn a degree and anticipate continuing their education; option for Associate's degree and facilitated entry into the Dental Hygiene Program, will be CODA-accredited

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## DENTAL HYGIENE APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

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To help dentists build a dental assistant workforce through registered apprenticeships, Charter Apprentices administers an apprenticeship program that combine classroom education with on-the-job experiential learning. The program is competency-based (unlike the traditional time-based model) and utilizes national standards to ensure consistent training and competency from state to state and office to office.

Utilizing the program gives employers access to funding resources that offset the apprentices' wages, pay for the classroom learning and provide child-care and transportation support. Participants are paid using progressive wage scale based on competencies attained. An extended probationary period for apprenticeships serves to better evaluate technical and behavioral competencies and fit.

The apprenticeship program has received state approval in Utah and Montana. The state approval includes grant and workforce funding, including training wage offsets.



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## DENTISTRY CAMP FOR 6<sup>TH</sup>-12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE (MARYLAND)

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University of Maryland's *Planet Smilez* program hosts a week-long summer camp of immersive experiences for middle and high school students that emphasize oral and systemic health education and encourage pursuit of dental careers, including mentorship by current dental students. The program also offers a one-day pre-dental event that introduces the different dental professions.