



Oral Health Workforce Development Summit Summary

Fall 2025

Growing and **developing** the oral health workforce in Michigan.

What We Did

In August 2025, the Delta Dental Foundation (DDF) gathered nearly 100 oral health providers, educators, advocates and other stakeholders from across Michigan for the Fourth Annual Oral Health Workforce Development Summit.

Working with facilitators, the group began by discussing the current oral health landscape, highlighting statewide projects and initiatives addressing challenges raised during previous summits. The goal was to better understand the efforts underway and where more connections are needed.

Example projects included scholarship and loan repayment programs funded by the DDF and Delta Dental of Michigan, [a dental hygiene program feasibility study at Northern Michigan University](#), [a nationwide survey of dental hygiene programs conducted by the Michigan Health Council and funded by the DDF](#), dental hygiene program development at North Central Michigan College, and a [U.P. Future Health Leaders summer camp](#), which added oral health careers for the very first time.

Attendees also reviewed the work of the initiative's subcommittees—ad hoc data and metrics, career pathways, workplace environment and retention, and recruitment—which meet throughout the year. These projects included:

- developing a career shadowing pilot program for middle and high school students interested in dental careers;



- conducting a survey of dental teams at safety-net dental clinics regarding workplace satisfaction; and
- developing a pilot “dental camp” to introduce high school students to careers in oral health.

Further discussions explored solutions related to dental hygiene program capacity, recruiting new adults into the oral health workforce, reengaging professionals who left the oral health workforce, flexible scheduling, consensus around changes to scope of practice, and CODA requirements.

What We Found

Dental Hygiene Program Capacity

- What: Expand dental hygiene program capacity to train more hygienists.
- Why: There's a [nationwide shortage of dental hygienists](#), especially within the safety net. However, barriers exist to expanding dental hygiene programs.

- Potential solutions: Reduce the need for expanded clinic space by partnering with FQHCs or other safety-net clinics to train hygienists; offer weekend and evening cohorts to make it easier for nontraditional students to attend; and explore ways to make it easier for more clinicians to become educators.

Recruiting New Adults into the Oral Health Workforce

- What: Encourage more adults, especially those who are currently underrepresented in oral health, to switch careers. As an example, this might mean encouraging [more men and people of color to enter dental hygiene](#) or assisting and uplifting the roles of lab technicians, front-office staff, billing support and more.
- Why: Dental hygiene offers a stable, often well-paying career with traditional hours and benefits could be beneficial to adults looking to make a career change or reenter the workforce.
- Potential solutions: Marketing campaigns focused on recruiting adults from underrepresented groups; programs that award credit for previous academic work; and additional support for nontraditional students (e.g., flexible work and educational program schedules, childcare and financial assistance).

Reengaging Professionals that Left the Oral Health Workforce

- What: Determine how to welcome people back to the profession by addressing workplace concerns.
- Why: During the pandemic, [many oral health professionals, especially dental hygienists, left the oral health workforce and did not return](#), exacerbating shortages.
- Potential solutions: Talk to people who have left the field and find out what, if anything, would help them return; then, pilot workplace environment improvements and monitor retention and returns.

Flexible Scheduling

- What: Create flexible scheduling models that support employee needs.
- Why: Many people are increasingly requesting flexible scheduling to help support well-being, caregiving and more.
- Potential solutions: The workplace environment and retention subcommittee will design a flexible scheduling model for safety-net dental clinics and pilot it at select locations.

Changes to Scope of Practice

- What: Identify areas of consensus around scope of practice changes.
- Why: Change is coming. Embracing dental therapy and expanding the duties of dental assistants and hygienists would enable more people to practice at the top of their licenses and increase access to care.
- Potential solutions: Develop scope of practice recommendations to help shape future policy discussions if they arise.

CODA Requirements

- What: Encourage changes or more flexibility to CODA standards.
- Why: Rigid and potentially dated CODA standards have been repeatedly identified as barriers to creating innovative, accessible educational program models.
- Potential solutions: Form a subcommittee to assess CODA standards and develop feedback to encourage more flexibility and accessibility, even within the existing standards.

Looking Ahead

The Oral Health Workforce Initiative's advisory committee will convene periodically to review the summit's findings and the work of each subcommittee. Subcommittees will continue their efforts, with lessons from the summit in mind. For more information about the advisory committee, subcommittees and the Oral Health Workforce Development group, email workforcedevelopment@deltadentalmi.com.