

House Committee on Health Care
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

March 4, 2021

Chair Prusak and Members of the House Health Care Committee:

The Oregon Dental Association (ODA) represents more than 2,100 Oregon dentists and is dedicated to ensuring that all Oregonians have access to quality oral health care. The ODA strongly supports HB 2977, the bill which will fund the much-needed Dental Director position in Oregon.

Critical Role

The State Dental Director plays the critical role of helping to guide state efforts, and also help facilitate the efforts of various oral health partners, toward ensuring equitable oral health care access and care outcomes for every Oregonian.

The position is critical. In addition to serving as the lead advocate toward access and outcomes, the position of Dental Director with the Oregon Health Authority provides numerous other leadership functions and benefits. Among these are:

- 1) The ability, structure, and knowledge for Oregon to compete for millions of dollars in federal grants related to oral health care. Without a director, Oregon often misses opportunities for these grants.
- 2) Clear authority and departmental capacity to establish and lead efforts on clinical, fiscal and policy priorities for oral health in Oregon.
- 3) A dedicated advocate to guide and help manage complex issues around Medicaid reimbursements and access challenges (including access for rural, tribal and economically-disadvantaged communities)

COVID Challenges

The COVID crisis also highlighted other reasons why the dental director position is so critical, and why expanding the bill to create an entire dental director office - as per the intent of the original dental director statute – is also important.

At the outset of the pandemic, many dental offices were closed for months. During that time, OHA and Oregon OSHA worked hard to decide what needed to be done to allow dental offices to open to treat patients. Without a dental director or dental director office, however, there was no one at the state level who had intimate knowledge around oral health. It was difficult, therefore, for OHA and OSHA to understand basic dental office operations and what steps were necessary to safely reopen. The pandemic was and remains challenging under any scenario, however there is no doubt that some oral health patients in Oregon suffered due to delayed treatments resulting from the absence of a state dental director and director's office.

Necessary Prioritization of Quality Oral Health Access

The bottom-line is that the dental director position provides a critical link between oral health and overall health and well-being. The office is vital to helping the state prioritize oral health; it is vital to helping prioritize preventive care versus costlier reactive care; it is vital to ensuring access by breaking-down historic barriers for underserved communities; and it is vital in the case of public health emergencies to assure patients can receive adequate and timely care.

For all of these reasons, the Oregon Dental Association encourages support of HB 2977.

Sincerely,



Brad Hester, DMD
President, Oregon Dental Association