



Vote Yes on HB 2979A: 2023 Dental Workforce Package

Oregon is experiencing a critical shortage of dental assistants and hygienists. Without adequate auxiliary staff, dentists are forced to cut back patient care hours, and patients go without the care they need, which can lead to unnecessary pain, interfere with their ability to work and go about their daily lives, and result in costly health complications down the line.

The Oregon Employment Department has identified dental assisting as one of the most challenging roles to fill of all vacant health care jobs. Data indicate approximately 10% of Oregon's 5,480 dental assistant positions are vacant — with twice as many open positions as new dental assistants joining the field.

By investing in the pathways people take to become dental assistants and hygienists, and supporting dental professionals who work in underserved communities, the Legislature can strengthen and build the pipeline of new dental assistants and hygienists and ensure Oregonians do not lose access to care.

- **Community College Dental Assisting and Hygiene Programs** — Funds allocated to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission would be granted 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** — 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** — 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) serving priority communities, increasing access to care for tribal, rural, low-income, and other underserved populations while supporting recruitment and retention of dental care providers. Funds would be available for providers, FQHCs, and employers serving Medicaid patients.
- **Tribal Dental Professions Education** — Funds provided to federally recognized tribes and tribal organizations would support the development and implementation of programs for tribal youth to learn about and become interested in dental professions.
- **Dental Assisting Chairside Training** — Funds allocated to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission would support the centralization of on-the-job, chairside dental assisting training resources on a website. The commission- in consultation with stakeholders- will also provide financial assistance to individuals seeking access to existing online dental assistant training materials and resources, and they may develop additional training materials if necessary.