

June 20, 2023

Co-Chairs Girod, Holvey and members of the Ways and Means Committee on Capital Construction,

The Oregon Dental Association (ODA) represents over 2100 dentists practicing in all areas of the state. The ODA urges leadership not to forget the dental workforce crisis as end of Session spending bills are being finalized. As strong investments in other sectors of the behavioral health and healthcare workforce are announced and funded, it is critical that oral health is not left behind yet again. However, it appears that this is the case.

HB 2979, ODA's 2023 priority bill, is a robust package of \$20M in spending that will address all avenues of the dental workforce crisis. Even **SOME** of this funding could have important, critical impact on the dental workforce crisis. Oregon is experiencing a critical shortage of dental assistants and hygienists, vital oral health care providers. Without enough auxiliary staff, dentists are forced to cut back their hours and the number of patients they serve, reducing access to care. This isn't a new problem, but it has been greatly exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Oregon Dental Association is collaborating with dental assistants, education, government, and other partners to address this crisis. We have over **20 different organizational partners** who have built and supported this packet. Together, we are pursuing short- and long-term solutions that will help to resolve urgent workforce needs, expand access to care for underserved Oregonians and improve diversity of the dental care workforce. We believe it is a critical time for the Oregon Legislature to invest in oral health across the state. **HB 2979A proposes \$20M in one-time funding, none of which is included in the Christmas Tree bill. ODA strongly urges Legislators to fund these critical investments either through the Emergency Board or in the 2024 Session.**

Community College Dental Assisting and Hygiene Programs: \$5 million investment

Funds allocated to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission would be administered 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: \$5 million investment

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: \$7 million investment

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) working in priority communities, increasing access to care for tribal, rural, low-income, and other underserved populations while supporting recruitment and retention of critically needed dental care providers. Funds would be available for providers, FQHCs, and employers serving Medicaid patients.

Tribal Dental Professions Education: \$1 million investment

Funds provided to a tribal entity for the creation of a dental professions education program to support the administration of programs for tribal youth to learn about and become interested in dental professions

Dental Assisting Training Module Development: \$2 million investment

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.