

2025 PENNSYLVANIA ORAL HEALTH SUMMIT



SUMMARY REPORT



Transforming Systems to Strengthen Smiles

Harrisburg, PA

November 12 & 13, 2025

Hosted by Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health

The 2025 Pennsylvania Oral Health Summit, hosted by Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health (PCOH), convened to gather oral health stakeholders from across Pennsylvania (PA) for education, discussion, and networking. PCOH created an open space for open discussion and idea-sharing. The theme of the two-day event was “Transforming Systems to Strengthen Smiles” and consisted of a keynote address, greetings from the Pennsylvania Department of Health and Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, 20 individual presentations, and three Q&A sessions with presenters. Takeaways were noted by large group reflection, electronic submission, and formal evaluation after the event. The event was maxed out with nearly 140 attendees, staff, sponsors, and presenters. PCOH is grateful to all involved for making this event a success!



Opening

Incoming Board Chair Micah Gursky welcomed attendees to the 2025 PA Oral Health Summit. He acknowledged the Highmark Foundation and United Concordia Dental as the 2025 Prime Event Sponsor and thanked all other sponsors and attendees for supporting the event. He introduced Helen Hawkey, PCOH Executive Director. Helen recognized the PCOH Board of Directors, staff, and the 2025 Summit Planning Team. Helen acknowledged the makeup of the attendees in the room and the PA counties represented. She paid special tribute to the 12 attendees who have been to all five PA oral health summits.

Keep Going: Essential Advocacy in a Shifting Oral Health Landscape

Dr. Chelsea Fosse, from the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD), kicked off the event with a powerful keynote address that motivated attendees to take action with oral health advocacy. She reviewed current topics such as connecting children to care, pregnancy and postpartum Medicaid coverage, Medicaid adult dental coverage, and adult dental as a potential essential health benefit (EHB). She provided background on the current oral health federal infrastructure and recent headlines around oral health on the national level. She reviewed what attendees can expect to see legislatively in the near future and tips for advocating in the current oral health landscape. Lastly, she shared helpful online tools and data resources for attendees to use in their advocacy efforts and daily work.



Brightening Smiles for Rural Pennsylvania

Senator Dave Argall (R-29) and Representative Jamie Barton (R-124) officially announced Temple University's rural dental education center and clinic is coming to Tamaqua, Pennsylvania. Looking back, both Micah Gursky of Tamaqua and Dean Amid Ismail from the Kornberg School of Dentistry at Temple University presented at the 2023 PA Oral Health Summit. The two connected, and a partnership was born with the new clinic set to open for the fall 2026 semester. The education center and clinic are opening in a former Rite Aid pharmacy. Dental students will be trained during the day and dental hygiene students will train in the evening. The project includes student housing in downtown Tamaqua. The ultimate goal is for 20 dental students to be placed in the clinic by spring 2027.



Pitt Dental Medicine Regional Training Centers: A Creative and Sustainable Solution to Improve Oral Health and Workforce Shortages in Rural Pennsylvania

Dean Marnie Oakley from the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine shared how Pitt Dental Medicine created regional training centers as a creative and sustainable solution to the oral health workforce shortages in rural PA. The regional training centers will allow residents and students to train in rural communities as opposed to the cities where the PA dental schools are located. This will support the education of residents, dental hygienists, and dental assistants and benefit the communities served.

From Need to Action: Central Penn's Community-Driven Approach to Dental Workforce Development

Dr. Michael Verber of Verber Dental Group presented on Central Penn College's new expanded function dental assistant program created as a result of community need. The program is centrally located and housing is available for students to live on campus. Scholarships are available for students looking to enroll.



Dental School Applications and Post-Graduation Decisions



Dean Mark Wolff from the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine presented on the national dentist shortages and current shortage in Pennsylvania. There is a shortage of dental schools, qualified applicants, and faculty. He included data for the number of Pennsylvania residents admitted to the three major dental schools in PA. Dean Wolff focused on what Pennsylvania can do to encourage students to enter the field, support new graduates, and support new practitioners.

Bridging the Gap: Current Landscapes and Emerging Solutions for Pennsylvania's Safety Net Dental Workforce

Caitlin Wilkinson from the PA Association of Community Health Centers (PACHC) gave background on Pennsylvania community health centers, federally qualified health centers, and how health professional shortage areas (HPSAs) affect communities in PA. Caitlin reviewed the loan repayment options available for licensed clinicians working in HPSAs as well as the National Health Service Corps Programs. Caitlin armed attendees with strategies to strengthen the workforce and spotlights on community health centers taking innovative approaches to recruitment.



Strengthening Pennsylvania's Dental Assisting Workforce



Paulette Dietz from the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine focused her presentation on the need for more dental assistants in Pennsylvania, especially in the Appalachian counties. She highlighted the most “at need” counties and current challenges for recruiting and retaining dental assistants. She shared innovative and promising approaches happening in Pennsylvania and other states and left attendees with recommendations for the state.

Applicant Trends and Workforce Realities: A Data-Driven Look at the Dental Hygiene Pipeline

Amanda Kundrod from Westmoreland County Community College brought attendees up to speed on the current trends in dental hygiene program applications, acceptance rates and barriers to entering the dental hygiene field, challenges and opportunities to the dental hygiene pipeline, and implications of the application trends on underserved regions. She shared her personal experience and positive changes made to the application process for dental hygienists at her program.



The Role of Dental Practitioners in Recognizing Abuse and Supporting Patients Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence



Aakriti Dave, a dental student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Dental Medicine, presented on the role of dental practitioners in recognizing abuse and supporting patients experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV). She introduced the “Give Back a Smile Program” which is a national program with very little participation from Pennsylvania dentists.

Oral Health Advocacy in PA: A Legislator's Perspective

PA State Representative Jacklyn Rusnock had obligations with the PA House being in session and was not able to attend this presentation. We were delighted Rep. Rusnock was able to stop by the cocktail reception later in the event. In her absence, Helen Hawkey shared Rep. Rusnock's slides for attendees. Rep. Rusnock practiced as a dental hygienist, educator, and now serves as a PA State Representative in Berks County. She shared a collaborative approach to advocacy and tips on how to make connections to amplify a collective voice.

A State Dental Board Perspective from Awareness to Action

Donna Murray represented the Pennsylvania State Board of Dentistry at the Summit. She provided background on the role of the State Board of Dentistry (SBOD), future meeting dates, and ways attendees can get involved. She had attendees participate in an interactive activity where they read through potential scenarios the SBOD may encounter.



Restoring Adult Dental Benefit to Medicaid



Tammy Rosing from Put People First! PA spoke on the negative impact from cutting the adult dental benefit for Medicaid recipients in 2011. Tammy shared how Put People First! PA has been organizing to restore the dental benefit and how attendees can support the cause.

Oral Health Advocacy, A Health Center Approach

Eric Kiehl represented the Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers (PACHC). He provided background on federally qualified health centers and how they help communities with access issues. He shared the importance of advocacy, how to build relationships, and how to engage with effective storytelling.



Disability Health Care Rights and Oral Health



Vanessa Rastovic, AccessLab, gave background on the context/problem faced by people with disabilities in accessing dental care. She provided examples of how standardized charting and scheduling can help both providers and patients in achieving a successful appointment.

Cocktail Reception

On the first day of the Summit, PCOH hosted a cocktail reception for all attendees including sponsors, exhibitors, presenters, and students. State and federal legislators and staff were also invited to attend to meet with oral health stakeholders. Students shared project posters. This was also a great opportunity for attendees to visit exhibit tables and connect with sponsors.



Greetings from the Pennsylvania Department of Health



Kelly Dupler represented the Pennsylvania Department of Health Oral Health Program Bureau of Health Promotion and Risk Reduction. Kelly gave an overview of the Oral Health Program, provided background on the current oral health landscape in PA, and shared updates on the Pennsylvania Oral Health Plan 2020-2030. She also gave insight on current funding and ongoing projects.

Greetings from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services

Dr. Sean Shamloo, Chief Dental Officer, brought greetings from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services. He gave a high-level overview of Pennsylvania's Medicaid Program, a brief description of the Department of Human Service's involvement in various projects, and how they are improving access to dental services. He gave recent updates related to dental benefits and policies in the Medical Assistance Program.



Policy in Focus: 2025 Legislative Update on Oral Health in Pennsylvania



Nicole Payonk from Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral Health (PCOH) delivered a legislative update on all oral health-related policies and initiatives with state legislature. She described the current policy environment, analyzed key opportunities and challenges, and applied strategies for effective engagement in policy efforts. She gave background on federal, state, and local policy priorities.



Oral Health Matters: Empowering Communities through CHWs

Elizabeth Schaffer from the Eastcentral Pennsylvania Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) gave background on AHEC before diving in to the role of community health workers (CHWs) in promoting oral health to families. She shared about the accredited community health worker training program through AHEC and a recent project providing oral health education in Spanish.



N.I.C.E. Program - Non-Invasive Caries Elimination



Dr. Larry Paul from SKYGEN presented on a new initiative, the N.I.C.E. Program, an effort to increase non-invasive caries elimination. This program focuses on prevention, provides a toolkit for dental providers, and lowers payer costs. This program could especially be effective for pediatric patients and individuals with special health care needs.

School Dental Services & Medicaid Billing in PA

Dr. Corinna Culler presented on a recent project with PCOH focused on school dental services in PA. She gave background on the methods, data, and current landscape of the mandated dental screening program. The results found that school nurses frequently encounter student oral health issues, which has a significant impact on their workload. School nurse participants expressed interest in more oral health knowledge, tools, and resources. Dr. Culler provided several policy recommendations as a result of the findings.



Bridging Gaps in Care: HealthLink Dental Clinic's Model for Community Impact



Jenny Salisbury from HealthLink Dental Clinic shared her charitable clinic's model of care and how they are improving access to dental care in the community. She highlighted partnerships, scheduling insights, and many lessons learned, HealthLink Dental Clinic provides valuable dental treatment to the uninsured and veterans in southeast PA.

Thinking Outside the Clinical Box

Alice Valenta delivered a presentation on Golden Onsite Dental and how providers can meet patients where they're at. She has done dental outreach in schools, nursing homes, community centers, and WIC offices utilizing portal equipment. She has found creative ways to connect patients with dental care.



Oral Health Awards

Earlier in 2025, PCOH launched the nomination process for the Oral Health Awards. Nominations were sent to and voted on by the PCOH Board of Directors. Thank you to UPMC Health Plan for sponsoring the awards. Awards were presented to the following:

- Alice Valenta, Oral Health Champion (Individual)
- Kids Smiles, Inc., Oral Health Champion (Organization)
- Central Penn College Dental Programs, Oral Health Changemaker



The Future is Minimally Invasive: Expanding Access, Preserving Teeth, and Improving Practice Sustainability



Thanks to the support of Elevate, PCOH was able to invite Dr. Jonathan Norris from Montshire Pediatric Dentistry to share his expertise on minimally invasive dental care. Dr. Norris gave a background on the issue with caries and the impact of Medicaid cuts to dental. He gave a rundown on current medications and tools on the market for minimally invasive care methods. Dr. Norris shared the great benefits of minimally-invasive care techniques for patients and providers.

Next Steps for All

- Sign up for your local water board announcements to be notified about fluoride changes.
- Look into preventive and minimally-invasive care services at your dental practice or clinic. Talk with your own provider about these services for yourself and your family.
- Follow state and federal legislation so that you can be informed.
- Educate career counselors at middle and high schools about all dental careers, including EFDAs, dental hygienists, and dentists. They cannot promote careers they don't know about or understand.
- Ensure other providers know what EFDAs are and how they can be used in practices.
- Include financial resources and scholarship options when talking to high school students and parents about dental careers.
- Make dental hygiene and EFDA programs more accessible for non-traditional students. Consider night classes, hybrid programs, etc.
- Carefully use social media to connect patients with care (clinics, events. etc.)
- Personal stories are still important for legislators. Share your experiences as a dental provider or patient seeking care with your legislator.
- Managed care organizations can engage and work with organizations like Golden Onsite Dental that meet patients where they are.
- Continue advocating for oral health and policy change.

A special thank you to our 2025 PA Oral Health Summit Sponsors! This event would not have been successful without your support.



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TRANSFORMING SYSTEMS
TO STRENGTHEN SMILES**

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