

Building a Strong and Sustainable Oral Health Workforce in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania faces persistent gaps in dental care access — strengthening the oral health workforce is key to improving overall health, equity, and community well-being. This report outlines strategies to build, strengthen, and sustain the dental workforce through coordinated policy, financial, and educational efforts.

Current Challenges:

- 148 Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (dHPSAs) in Pennsylvania
- Declining numbers of dentists, hygienists, and assistants
- Uneven distribution of training programs and providers, limiting rural access
- Recruitment and retention challenges intensified by COVID-19

Suggested Action Steps

- Streamline licensure and training pathways
- Strengthen loan repayment and scholarship incentives
- Launch pipeline programs in schools/career and technical education
- Support teledentistry and mobile care
- Expand provider types and/or scope of practice
- Enhance preventive care reimbursement
- Improve workplace flexibility and career ladder supports
- Reform payment and insurance systems
- Reduce administrative barriers

Three broad goals are each aligned to policy, financial, and education “levers”:

- **Expand the workforce pipeline**
- **Extend provider reach**
- **Retain and support existing providers**

Workforce shortages are limiting access to essential dental care across Pennsylvania. With coordinated leadership, strategic investment, and modernized care delivery, advocates and policymakers can build a stronger, more equitable oral health system that attracts, supports, and retains the providers our communities depend on.



Pennsylvania
Department of Health



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