



# GEORGIA'S ACTION FOR DENTAL HEALTH

## An Initiative of the Georgia Dental Association

The Georgia Dental Association Action for Dental Health is a concerted effort to maintain and enhance the oral health and the overall health of all Georgians.

### **Executive Summary**

Optimal oral health is essential to overall health. In 2015, the Georgia Dental Association launched the Georgia Action for Dental Health with the goal of advancing comprehensive solutions to prevent dental disease before it starts and ensure that all Georgians can obtain treatment by a dentist, regardless of their socio-economic background. The GDA strongly believes that achieving this goal will require strengthening public-private partnerships and adequately funding public health programs in rural and urban settings designed to meet Georgians' unique healthcare needs by emphasizing the importance of oral healthcare as a component of one's overall health status. Georgia's Action for Dental Health is a multi-year initiative as the GDA continues to work with community stakeholders and healthcare advocates to attain these objectives.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Promote quality, attainable dental care for the uninsured and underserved in Georgia so that all patients have a dental home.
2. Promote oral health education and literacy to mitigate potential barriers to a dental home and reduce the public's misconceptions and fears of seeing a dentist.
3. Optimize the capacity of the current dental workforce and availability of publicly funded dental facilities to efficiently serve Georgians with preventative and therapeutic dental care.
4. Continue to advocate and educate policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public on the risks associated with unlicensed/unregulated treatment delivery methods and protect patient safety by only promoting/supporting initiatives that are sustainable, ethical, adhere to the standard of care for dental patients in Georgia, and always involve seeking treatment from a properly trained, Georgia-licensed dentist.
5. Ensure that patient safety remains a priority and that a Georgia-licensed dentist continues to be the head of the dental team and retains authority over all aspects of the practice of dentistry, especially regarding clinical and treatment decisions.

## STRATEGIES

1. **Promote quality, attainable dental care for the uninsured and underserved in Georgia so that all patients have a dental home.**
  - Connect patients needing care of a dentist and support a reimbursement process to cover the cost of care.
    - Pursue an adult preventative dental Medicaid program (including some limited restorative codes).
    - Pursue reimbursement fee increases in the current dental Medicaid system to provide more comprehensive coverage for low-income children, adults, and pregnant women.
  - Increase access to dental health services for the special needs populations by educating dentists and creating a formal training program through the GDA for treating this patient population to reduce barriers to care.
    - Seek and secure grant funding, public-private partnerships, and other funding sources to support this initiative.

- Pursue public-private partnerships and funding opportunities with the state legislature, Dental College of Georgia, US Department of Education, Georgia Department of Education, and other community stakeholders to establish a Georgia specific program for special needs dentistry.
- Increase the effectiveness of the existing Medicaid dental program in providing preventative care and treatment.
  - Pursue legislation creating a single administrator or carve out the administration of dental Medicaid benefits from the CMOs. This initiative would help streamline the current dental Medicaid system and reduce the administrative barriers to care for patients and providers.
  - Support and advocate for the passage of legislation establishing more transparency in the CMO-DMO system in Georgia.
  - Advocate for initiatives streamlining the Medicaid credentialing, billing, and auditing process for dental Medicaid providers.
- Require Care Management Organizations/Dental Management Organizations to contribute a portion of their revenue toward funding oral health program such as an adult dental Medicaid program.
- Support the presence of a dentist in all school-based clinics.
  - Potential new career path for dentists
  - Pilot program targeting schools with a large population of children on free and reduced cost lunch
- Develop and implement an oral health care caregiver education program for parents, caregivers, nursing home staff, and others providing care to individuals who are not fully independent.
- Continue to protect state funding for the GDA's Donated Dental Services Program to match special needs and medically compromised patients with volunteer dentists
- Advocate to remove barriers to care for rural, underserved, medically fragile, and veteran patient populations.
  - Pursue transportation solutions to help rural and underserved patients get to their appointments.

## **2. Promote oral health education and literacy to mitigate potential barriers to a dental home and help reduce the public's misconceptions and fears of seeing a dentist.**

- Develop partnerships with free and reduced fee dental clinics and other entities that serve patients who need a “dental home.”
  - Create residency opportunities in underserved communities within existing FQHCs or other public health facilities by collaborating with specific border-state dental schools.
- Work to establish curriculum standards and training materials for social workers in schools, nursing homes, and other supportive facilities to identify and address potential barriers to care (e.g. transportation).
  - Educate emergency room and nursing home facility staff on available resources to establish a referral list of local dentists to support emergency room diversion programs.
- Promote oral health education in public assistance programs.

- Support and expand preventive oral health education and referrals in pediatricians' offices.
- Utilize GDA Foundation to identify and promote self-sustaining charitable outreach programs.
  - Continue to utilize the Healthy Mouth Healthy Me! program to educate Georgians on the connection between dental health and overall health.

**3. Optimize the capacity of the current dental workforce and availability of publicly funded dental facilities to efficiently serve Georgians with preventative and therapeutic dental care.**

- Establish and adequately fund a dental student loan repayment program.
  - Continue to protect and expand state funding supporting Georgia's Rural Dental Student Loan Repayment Program.
- Require oral health education in schools.
- Expand funding for county health department dental programs.
  - Establish a sliding scale dental specialty referral network for FQHCs and other public health facilities
- Oppose efforts to decrease funding or reduce requirements for community fluoridation programs.
- Expand public/private partnerships with federally qualified community health centers using private practice providers.
  - Establish a protocol for licensed Georgia dentists to rent underutilized public health dental care facilities.
- Ensure the Dental Director position at the Department of Public Health remains filled by a Georgia-licensed dentist, which is responsible for public health dentistry initiatives and outreach.

**4. Continue to advocate and educate policymakers, stakeholders, and the general public on the risks associated with unlicensed/unregulated treatment delivery methods and protect patient safety by only promoting/supporting initiatives that are sustainable, ethical, adhere to the standard of care for dental patients in Georgia, and always involve seeking treatment from a properly trained, Georgia-licensed dentist or other licensed allied dental professional.**

- Advocate legislative and budget initiatives that remove barriers for rural, underserved, and medically fragile populations.
- Protect the dental profession against burdensome federal and state regulations, particularly with respect to Medicaid, which could decrease access and increase costs to patients.
- Use legislative advocacy to support member dentists regarding dental insurance/ Medicaid reimbursements, and scope of practice pressures that compromise patient safety.

**5. Ensure that patient safety remains the focus and is protected by Georgia-licensed dentists remaining the head of the dental team and retaining authority over all aspects of the practice of dentistry, especially regarding clinical and treatment decisions.**

- Promote to Georgians that they always seek treatment from a properly trained, Georgia-licensed dentist.