

Strengthening the Oral Health Workforce Through State Oral Health Improvement Plans

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A robust oral health workforce is essential for ensuring access to care for people served by Medicaid. However, only [41 percent](#) of U.S. dentists participate in Medicaid/CHIP, even as many states expand dental benefits. Ongoing challenges in Medicaid provider recruitment and retention have led to critical gaps in access to care for members, especially for historically underserved communities.

State Oral Health Improvement Plans (SOHIPs) can serve as a powerful tool for strengthening the oral health workforce by providing a structured, strategic roadmap for states to address gaps and build capacity. More broadly, SOHIPs support statewide efforts to advance oral health across populations by guiding state programs in establishing and measuring progress on priorities and coordinating efforts across sectors and stakeholder groups. While SOHIP content and structure vary by state, they are [typically informed](#) by state and local oral health needs assessment data and include an evaluation component to track quality improvement, progress, and outcomes.

This tool shares select examples of SOHIPs from across the U.S., including each state's priorities, objectives, and strategies for supporting and sustaining a strong oral health workforce. It is designed to support oral health stakeholders (e.g., state oral health programs, coalitions, provider groups) who participate in SOHIP development or who are otherwise impacted by a SOHIP. The resource is a product of the [Medicaid Oral Health Workforce Implementation Learning Series](#), an initiative that is working with Medicaid agencies and their partners in 11 states — **Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Nevada, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin** — to strengthen the Medicaid oral health workforce. The learning series is led by the Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) through support from CareQuest Institute for Oral Health.

SOHIP Planning and Needs Assessment Resources

The Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD) provides [resources](#) to guide states in creating, implementing, and evaluating SOHIPs. The [State Oral Health Improvement Plan Toolkit](#) offers strategies, examples, and links to support every stage of plan development, from initial planning and stakeholder engagement to dissemination and evaluation. ASTDD's [State Oral Health Improvement Plan Comparison Tool](#) is an interactive resource to review and compare existing state plans. See also states' most recent SOHIP, if available, on ASTDD's [State Programs](#) page.

State Examples of SOHIP Oral Health Workforce Strategies

The table on the following pages highlights strategies that seven states — **Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Tennessee,** and **Wisconsin** — have included within their SOHIPs to strengthen workforce infrastructure and increase access to oral health providers. A 2024 [analysis](#) found that 40 of 44 SOHIPs included direct or indirect strategies to improve workforce access and experience for Medicaid populations. These seven states identify the workforce as a distinct priority area.

Workforce Themes: Among these states, approaches to strengthening the workforce vary based on each state’s unique environment and population needs. The table on the next pages includes excerpts of selected workforce strategies from the highlighted states, reflecting — but not limited to — the themes below (referenced in the table as “Theme 1,” “Theme 2,” etc.):

1. **Implement novel workforce models of care delivery**, such as using community health workers (CHWs), public health dental hygienists (PHDHs), expanded dental assistants (EDAs), dental therapists (DTs), integrated care models, mobile clinics, and telehealth;
2. **Reduce the economic burden of education debt and the cost of establishing and running a dental practice;**
3. **Encourage oral health professionals to work in rural and underserved areas**, including dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs);
4. **Promote dental careers in high schools, workforce development centers, community colleges, universities,** and equivalent settings;
5. **Advance education, recruitment, and retention strategies to improve the racial and ethnic diversity** in the dental workforce to align with state populations;
6. **Support continuing education, training opportunities, and development of resources** for oral health students and professionals; and
7. **Strengthen data collection infrastructure** to better track and identify state workforce trends.

Some SOHIPs include additional details not described in this tool that could be helpful for stakeholders to explore further (see state names in the table for links), such as information on key partners, outcome measures, and funding mechanisms to advance specific strategies.

Beyond SOHIPs: Rhode Island’s Workforce-Focused Strategy

While many states outline oral health workforce needs within a SOHIP, **Rhode Island** took an alternate approach by developing a dedicated [Dental Workforce Strategic Plan](#). This plan offers a focused roadmap for strengthening the dental workforce outside of a traditional SOHIP framework. Like SOHIPs, Rhode Island’s plan identifies priorities, strategies, and measurable goals related to oral health, but its sole focus on workforce provides a more targeted pathway for states to advance access to care by addressing provider shortages. **To learn about Rhode Island’s approach, see [Strengthening Rhode Island’s Medicaid Oral Health Workforce](#).**



SOHIP Oral Health Workforce Strategies by State

Illinois Oral Health Plan V (2026-2030)		
Priority	Objective	Activities
<p><u>Community Programs Linked to Clinical Services: Workforce and Infrastructure</u></p>	<p>Increase the number of organizations and businesses that implement policies, systems, and processes for sharing and/or making connections to community resources based on dental and health-related social needs (HRSNs). <i>Themes 6, 7</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Statewide:</i> Strengthen the oral health infrastructure through funding, surveillance, technology, and workforce capacity to improve patient navigation to meet identified needs and/or health risks (e.g., tobacco prevention, nutrition, and chronic disease preventative and disease management programs). • <i>Region:</i> Connect existing local and regional collaboratives to support connections between oral health, HRSNs, and community programs and service. • <i>Community:</i> Increase awareness of and access to oral health and related resources among individuals, families, high-risk populations, and service/program providers (e.g., food banks, child care programs, and mental health services).
	<p>Drive workforce development and intervention models designed to improve oral health outcomes for all Illinoisans with a focus on Medicaid recipients and uninsured persons through role, scope, or service/program delivery site expansion. <i>Theme 1</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Statewide:</i> Pilot and evaluate effective workforce models of care delivery (e.g., CHWs, PHDHs, Expanded Dental Assistants [EFDAs], Dental Therapists [DTs]) to increase access to oral health care, prevention, education, and connection to social/community programs and services. Utilize data to engage and educate policymakers to address regulatory barriers and expand the scope of practice for dental professionals. • <i>Region:</i> Expand and/or implement evidence-based workforce models like CHWs, PHDHs, EFDAs, and DTs. Incorporate innovative service or program delivery approaches, such as mobile clinics, telehealth, or integrated care models. • <i>Community:</i> Implement models of care that meet community needs and address gaps in care. Ensure models minimize known barriers to care, such as location, cost, and hours of operations and are inclusive of cultural and other social factors.
<p><u>Health System Interventions: Workforce and Infrastructure</u></p>	<p>Drive workforce development and intervention models at all levels (dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants) designed to improve oral health outcomes for all with a focus on Medicaid members and uninsured persons. <i>Themes 2, 3, 6, 7</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Statewide:</i> Work with the Center for Rural Health to improve accuracy of dental HPSA provider shortage designations by developing partnerships with payers to access up-to-date practice hours and location information. Maximize the number of dentists and dental hygienists who receive support through the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program and increase the number of dentists who receive support through the Illinois Loan Repayment Program. • <i>Region:</i> Collaborate with large hospital systems, academic institutions, and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to increase dental residency programs to improve health care capacity in shortage areas. Utilize existing collaboratives to develop and deploy recruitment materials and provide training and technical assistance to rural and/or high-need communities around strategies to recruit and retain oral health providers. • <i>Community:</i> Highlight successful programs and showcase them for others to adopt regionally. Empower under-resourced community members to collaborate with local health centers to add in-house dental services.
	<p>Expand the use of minimally invasive dentistry (MID). <i>Theme 6</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Statewide:</i> Increase awareness and education among state oral health coalitions, state oral health programs, state professional associations, and state policymakers of the benefits of minimally invasive dentistry; state, private, public insurers realize cost benefits and how MID is much less traumatic for young children; and expand age group-reimbursed sealants on primary teeth. <i>(continues on next page)</i>

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		<p><i>(continued from previous page)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Region:</i> Increase education opportunities (training, technical assistance, etc.) among dental providers on evidence-based dentistry (EBD) practices. Increase organizational infrastructure to implement processes and workflows to support adopting EBD practices. • <i>Community:</i> Craft plans and messages to empower local advocates and families/individuals to use their influence to support MID goals with decision makers and promote the benefits of MID throughout the community.
<p><u>Policies, Systems, and Environmental Approaches: Workforce and Infrastructure</u></p>	<p>Increase the number of dental providers enrolled in Medicaid by enhancing reimbursement rates and streamlining the enrollment process, ensuring better access, and supporting dental providers’ ability to deliver sustainable and effective treatment. <i>Themes 3, 7</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Statewide:</i> Collaborate with state Medicaid leaders to establish an annual statewide report detailing providers, locations, and types of oral health services delivered to Medicaid members, while identifying gaps in the Medicaid dental provider network to inform future improvements. Identify funding for basic health care (e.g., promote using Medicaid to cover regular dental cleanings) and advocate for insurance coverage for developing technologies and pharmaceuticals for disease management. • <i>Region:</i> Have Medicaid-enrolled dentists bring together providers in peer group settings/forums to support expanded provider enrollment. Work with Medicaid/DentaQuest to create a peer work group and support dentists as they enroll — especially in low-access areas of the state. Assist providers and connectors of health care in fully understanding Medicaid program and its dental benefits. • <i>Community:</i> Partner with local dental societies, community health organizations, and dental providers to raise awareness about the benefits of Medicaid enrollment.
	<p>Support workforce investments focused on representing racial, ethnic, and geographically underrepresented minorities at all levels of the oral health workforce (e.g., community health worker, dental assistant, dental hygienist, dentist, and specialist providers). <i>Themes 2, 3, 4, 5, 6</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Statewide:</i> Incorporate avenues and career opportunities for dental professionals within CHW trainings, professional development sessions, etc. Increase awareness of and enrollment in Health Care Workforce Repayment Programs. • <i>Region:</i> Engage statewide association chapters to assist in promoting dental careers within high schools, workforce development centers, community colleges, universities, and equivalent settings. Partner with general education programs and courses to consider fields in oral health. • <i>Community:</i> Partner with Area Health Education Centers and American Dental Education Association to encouraged dental careers and/or continuing education opportunities within local communities (with a focus on underserved communities and recruitment of underrepresented minorities).

Michigan State Oral Health Plan (2025)		
Priority	Objective	Activities
<p><u>Michiganders have access to preventative and restorative oral health care because the state has developed the necessary infrastructure to effectively serve everyone.</u></p>	<p>Strengthen the oral health workforce, ensuring that dental professionals are available within a reasonable distance throughout the state, including the large rural and dense urban areas. Ways to strengthen the workforce include: (1) build infrastructure so that dentists are supported by adequate, well-trained staff; (2) examine ways to reduce the economic burden of educational debt and the cost of establishing a dental practice; and (3) encourage Black, Indigenous, and other people of color to enter the dental profession.</p> <p><i>Themes 2, 5, 7</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess workforce by: (1) analyzing adequacy of workforce and making recommendations for improvement; (2) advocating for policy changes to improve workforce; (3) providing opportunities for input on workforce assessment; (4) gathering and tracking data on all dental professionals and students at schools for dental professionals in Michigan; and (5) identifying ways to recruit BIPOC to become dental professionals and make recommendations to address barriers identified by BIPOC. Expand loan forgiveness options by: (1) recommending changes, improvements, and new loan options; (2) advocating for resources and programs that increase access to loan forgiveness; (3) providing training on how to access and apply for loan forgiveness programs; (4) tracking utilization of loan forgiveness programs by dental professions; and (5) developing and promoting scholarship and loan forgiveness programs for BIPOC who want to become dental professionals.
	<p>Support innovative practice models that utilize cost effective practice solutions such as asynchronous teledentistry and DT, embedding dental hygienists in community organizations and medical offices, and ensuring that there are options for emergency dental care that divert people from using hospital emergency rooms to provide temporary relief for oral infections.</p> <p><i>Themes 1, 6, 7</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for innovative care options by: (1) exploring and promoting innovative care options (teledentistry, DT, value-based care, after-hours/weekend dental emergency care options); (2) advocating for new Medicaid billing codes for teledentistry, inclusive dental (children and adults with disabilities), and case management services; (3) providing training on innovative care options and on servicing people with disabilities; and (4) tracking impact of innovative care options on dental provider shortage areas.

Missouri Oral Health Plan (2020-2025)		
Priority	Objective	Activities
<u>Support the development of the oral health workforce.</u>	Support and promote incentive programs that encourage oral health professionals to work in rural and underserved areas. <i>Themes 2, 3</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cooperate with and promote the Student Loan Repayment Program and National Health Services Corps with the Office of Rural Health and Primary Care. Promote incentive programs for oral health students that encourage students to practice in rural and underserved areas.
	Support the recruitment and retention of oral health professionals to work in rural and underserved areas. <i>Themes 2, 3</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with the Missouri Primary Care Association, Missouri School of Dentistry and Oral Health, University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Dentistry and the upcoming KCU College of Dental Medicine to recruit, place, and retain students that are more likely to provide care to rural and underserved areas. Support dental schools to educate dental students on public oral health programs, such as becoming Medicaid providers and safety net clinics. Support dental school faculty lunch and learns to provide the pros and cons of public health and safety net dental practices that can be later shared with dental students and faculty. Support and promote an increase in dental residency programs in areas of need within the state. Work with community organizations to find ways to support dentists in rural and underserved areas with economic challenges.
	Support programs that encourage students to pursue oral health careers. <i>Themes 4, 5</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with the Missouri Area Health Education Centers that sponsor pipeline programs that encourage students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds to pursue oral health careers. Encourage oral health professionals to participate in community-based programs to inform and assist students in choosing oral health as a career.
	Explore strategies to expand access to care through innovative approaches to oral health. <i>Theme 1</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and promote strategies such as teledentistry that seek to expand access to oral health care in underserved areas. Promote the use of CHWs to promote quality oral health care and education to people in underserved areas. Support initiatives that utilize oral health professionals to the full extent of their education and legal scope of practice.
	Assess the capacity and distribution of the oral health workforce. <i>Theme 7</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile and analyze data via an integrated, statewide database on the number, profession, practice characteristics, accepted payment sources, and geographic distribution of oral health professionals in Missouri.

Oral Health Is Health: Nevada Oral Health State Plan (2022-2032)		
Priority	Objective	Activities
<p>Developed to address Healthy People 2030 goal: Increase the number of states and DC that have an oral and craniofacial health surveillance system.</p>	<p>Increase access to culturally informed dental care for underserved populations across Nevada. <i>Themes 1, 5</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote education, recruitment, and retention strategies to improve the racial and ethnic diversity in the dental workforce to make it more aligned with the population in Nevada. Promote education and training of dental providers in decreasing bias and implicit bias to improve health outcomes of diverse populations. Develop partnerships with Tribal Clinics to deliver culturally informed dental education and explore innovative dental delivery services in tribal communities.
	<p>Develop and implement dental workforce strategies that address the workforce shortages in rural areas of Nevada and dental HPSAs. <i>Themes 1, 3, 6</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase opportunities for dental/dental hygiene students and residents to interact and volunteer with Nevada dentists in rural Nevada. Develop and implement innovative programs that will engage the dental workforce within dental HPSA and enhance dental services offered to populations living in the HPSAs. Expand mobile dental clinics and workforce development to address oral health of dental HPSAs in Nevada. Develop a plan to use community health workers to deliver services and engage patients through community-based prevention programs. Create pathways for dental hygienists to complete the American Dental Association Community Dental Health Coordination curriculum. Support dental hygienist’s education in public health dentistry and educate the dental hygienist about the various avenues a public health endorsed dental hygienist can take. Support public policy that creates public-private partnerships to create incentives for workforce expansions in underserved, rural, and uninsured areas.

Pennsylvania Oral Health Plan (2020-2030)		
Priority	Objective	Activities
<p>Oral Health Workforce</p>	<p>Health Infrastructure and Capacity <i>Themes 1, 3</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support programs that increase the number of dental providers in designated health professional shortage areas. Explore new workforce models while fully utilizing the current dental workforce. Facilitate medical and dental service integration with Head Start programs and other early learning services. Increase the number of CHWs providing oral health education and referrals.
	<p>Health Surveillance and Evaluation <i>Theme 7</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the development and maintenance of an accurate and current central workforce database that includes professionals listed by specialty and practice location. Establish a system for assessing oral health workforce capacity. Facilitate bi-annual access to Medicaid-participating workforce data. Coordinate the development of a CHW database. Identify gaps in the oral health workforce and develop strategies to address them. <i>(continues on next page)</i>

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	<p>Health Equity <i>Themes 1, 3, 5, 6</i></p>	<p><i>(continued from previous page)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote and support the use of CHWs/navigators in traditionally underserved communities. • Incorporate underserved/rural community practice recruitment into dental and dental hygiene curricula. • Develop and support a diverse and well-qualified workforce to provide evidence-based dental care to all populations, including those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. • Identify and support pipeline program development to ensure a competent and diverse future oral health workforce. • Provide guidance and education to dental and medical health professionals and staff to better understand social determinants of health that impact oral disease risk.
	<p>Health Policy and Advocacy <i>Themes 1, 2, 3</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for mandated and increased base level funding for the Medicaid dental fee schedule. • Revise current programs to allow for oral health services to be provided in school settings. • Develop or revise financial assistance programs for dental professionals who practice in rural areas and/or dental HPSAs. • Develop recruitment and retention activities for retaining oral health professionals in FQHCs and similar centers. • Redefine and expand roles of dental and medical professionals through revisions to state medical and dental practice acts to meet needs effectively and equitably. • Identify key decision makers and public champions who can advocate and promote oral health from a health equity perspective.
	<p>Health Community <i>Themes 1, 6</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase interdisciplinary clinical and professional collaboration between the medical, behavioral, and oral health workforce communities. • Promote education and training of medical primary care practitioners in the assessment and provision of basic oral health services. • In dental HPSAs, utilize hospital personnel to provide oral health referrals. • Collaborate with external partners, such as primary care associations, home visiting programs, advocacy organizations, philanthropic foundations and others, to promote oral health programs, activities, strategies and policies. • Develop programs to reduce the use of emergency departments for non-traumatic dental care. • Increase the number/percentage of medical providers who conduct oral cancer screenings/exams.

Tennessee State Oral Health Plan (2022-2027)		
Priority	Objective	Activities
Oral Health Resources and Workforce	Develop and research opportunities to enhance professional integration between oral health providers and medical providers. <i>Theme 1</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess current oral health integration in medical schools in Tennessee. Work with stakeholders to promote fluoride varnish applications by medical providers. Research and assess statewide and national integrated care models.
	Expand partnerships with dental training programs. <i>Theme 4</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess and identify dental training programs that offer interprofessional experiences for their residents on a state and national level. Share interprofessional program best practices with stakeholders. Increase collaborative efforts between Tennessee Department of Health Oral Health Services and dental training programs. Provide training opportunities for dental students and residents at Tennessee Department of Health and Safety Net clinics. Support dental and hygiene school expansion efforts in Tennessee.
	Actively seek funding for Tennessee Department of Health dental clinics to expand the targeted population to include uninsured adults and partner with Safety Net Clinics to expand their oral health reach. <i>Theme 2</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and maintain a database of oral health grant opportunities and share with stakeholders. Evaluate opportunities and apply for grant funding that aligns with Tennessee Department of Health Oral Health Services goals. Educate providers and assess expansion options for the Smile on 65+ program in Tennessee Department of Health dental clinics.
	Request Tennessee Department of Health - Health Related Boards collect information on practicing status of dentist and hygienist during licensure and license renewal. <i>Theme 6</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate current data and assess the need for data collection changes. Create map of Tennessee dental providers using information from the Tennessee Board of Dentistry to be shared with stakeholders.
	Map existing dental resources for public and provider use. <i>Theme 6</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain and distribute a list and map of dental care resources for Tennesseans on Tennessee Department of Health Oral Health Services website. Use innovative outreach methods to raise awareness of dental care resources for Tennesseans.

Wisconsin's Roadmap to Improving Oral Health (2020-2025)		
Priority	Objective	Activities
Workforce	Identify strategies to address gaps in the oral health workforce. <i>Themes 2, 3, 4, 5, 6</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote and enhance loan repayment plan for dental providers. Authorize additional oral health providers who are licensed, graduate from an accredited institution, and increase access to care. Increase training and fellowship opportunities for oral health professionals treating patients with special health care needs and underserved populations. Establish a hospital-based dental residency or general practice residency program. Increase recruitment, education, and financial support for students interested in oral health professions. Increase the diversity of the oral health workforce. Improve the portability of dental providers' licenses.
	Increase interdisciplinary clinical and professional knowledge and collaboration. <i>Themes 1, 4</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate collaboration between medical and dental students and professionals regarding oral health. Present oral health education information at hospitals' grand round presentations. Integrate oral health education into health professional educational curriculum. Integrate medical services into dental offices (i.e., blood pressure and diabetes screening).
	Promote lifelong learning related to oral health disciplines. <i>Themes 4, 6</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote career progression/promotion within oral health professions. Promote and provide cultural competency webinars and continuing education opportunities. Ensure that the dental workforce is informed on oral health best practices. Improve and increase recruitment and educational support for students interested in oral health professions.
	Promote the education and utilization of public health principles within the oral health community. <i>Theme 6</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote educational opportunities, such as webinars and conferences. Include public health principles and competencies in dental provider education curriculum.



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