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***Florida's Action for Dental Health* Reaches 10 Year Milestone, Making Inroads in Improving Oral Health and Access to Care in Florida**

The Florida Dental Association's comprehensive initiative to improve oral health has helped to provide care to thousands of patients across the state while supporting policies and funding to connect dentists with patients and communities in need

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (March 25, 2025) – While Florida is home to more than 17,000 dentists and thousands of dental team members across the state, many Floridians face barriers to accessing routine dental care, particularly in rural and underserved communities.

From Florida ranking as one of the lowest states in the country for Medicaid reimbursement rates to increasing dental student loan debts impacting dentists' ability to serve in public health and rural settings, the Florida Dental Association (FDA) recognized key barriers and the need for strategies and solutions to better connect dentists to where they are needed most.

In 2015, the FDA launched *Florida's Action for Dental Health*, a comprehensive initiative to improve oral health and the resulting overall health of all Floridians. This initiative identifies tangible strategies and objectives to better maximize Florida's dental workforce to expand public health dentistry and promote attainable dental care for the uninsured and underserved.

"Florida is home to thousands of dentists and dental students who are passionate about making a difference in people's lives and helping our communities grow and thrive," said Dr. Jeffrey Ottley, president of the Florida Dental Association. "We need to continue to work towards opportunities to bridge the gaps and connect dentists with the patients and communities that need them most."

Achievements over the past 10 years include:

- Since 2014, the FDA Foundation has hosted 10 Florida Mission of Mercy events in nine cities throughout the state, providing a total of more than 16,500 patients with approx. \$19 million worth of dental care services at no cost.
- Passage of legislation and funding to implement Florida's dental student loan repayment program, which helps bring dentists to rural and underserved areas by providing financial support to participating dentists – giving participants the opportunity to provide immediate, consistent care to patients in underserved areas while meeting their dental student loan debt.

- Each year, hundreds of dental students are graduating in the state of Florida ready to practice but with hundreds of thousands in student loan debt. This program helps participating dentists meet that debt while pursuing their passion for serving others.
- Passage of legislation and funding for a veterans dental care grant program to help charitable organizations and clinics across the state provide critical oral health care services and treatment to veterans at no cost.
 - Dentists across the state are treating veterans through charitable organizations, clinics and events that provide critical oral health care services and treatment to veterans at no cost. This legislation and funding will help further the reach and impact of these efforts.
- More than 2,200 patients have received more than \$11 million in donated care through Florida's Donated Dental Services program, which provides comprehensive dental treatment at no cost to Floridians who are disabled, elderly, or medically compromised, and unable to afford dental care.
- Passage of the Live Healthy Act to help expand the dental student loan repayment program, support training opportunities for dental students in federally qualified health centers and provide a much-needed \$35 million fee increase for dental services in Florida's Medicaid program, which hadn't received a funding increase since 2011.

"Florida dentists are dedicated to bringing forward meaningful solutions that are already making an impact now," said Dr. Ottley. "We are grateful for the support of Florida's leaders, lawmakers, and communities, which has been critical to these efforts. The Florida Dental Association looks forward to continued collaboration to provide opportunities for our current and future generations of dentists to deliver prevention and treatment where it is needed most, while maintaining the highest standard of care."

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About the Florida Dental Association

As the state's premier professional organization representing Florida-licensed dentists, the Florida Dental Association (FDA) serves as Florida's advocate for oral health. A constituent society of the American Dental Association, the FDA was established in 1884 to ensure patients receive the highest quality of care from dental professionals. The FDA is the leading expert and advocate on issues affecting Florida dentists and the oral health of Floridians To learn more, visit www.floridadental.org.