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FLORIDA DENTAL ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION PROVIDES MORE THAN \$1.79 MILLION IN DENTAL CARE AT NO COST TO MORE THAN 1,300 FLORIDIANS

Seventh Florida Mission of Mercy Event in Tallahassee Offers Relief from Pain and Infection and Restores Smiles

TALLAHASSEE, FL – The Florida Dental Association Foundation (FDA Foundation) hosted its seventh *Florida Mission of Mercy* event on March 11-12 at the Donald L. Tucker Civic Center, which provided more than 1,300 Floridians with donated dental care valued at over \$1.79 million.

“This gave me my confidence back,” said Jesse Graves, a local pastor in Tallahassee. “It’s amazing. They treated you like anyone else.”

The Florida Mission of Mercy is a two-day dental event sponsored by the FDA Foundation to provide treatment to patients, who for many reasons, lack access to dental care. Previous *Florida Mission of Mercy* events held in Tampa, Jacksonville, Pensacola, Fort Myers, and Orlando provided more than 10,000 patients with donated dental care valued at more than \$11 million.

“We are grateful for the opportunity to safely provide vital preventive care and treatment services to more than 1,300 patients,” said Dr. Sue Byrne, co-chair of the 2022 *Florida Mission of Mercy*.

“The *Florida Mission of Mercy* and the hundreds of dentists, dental professionals, medical professionals, and other volunteers who supported this event are making an important impact in our communities by addressing the needs of patients who may have otherwise sought temporary care at hospital emergency departments,” said Dr. Tracy Eckles, co-chair of the 2022 *Florida Mission of Mercy*.

While the *Florida Mission of Mercy* provides much-needed relief to thousands, the volume of patients participating in this program also highlights the significant need to promote oral health education, prevention, and access to routine dental services in Florida. Oral health is critical to overall health and success, and the challenges of accessing routine dental care result in repeated visits to the emergency room for preventable dental problems, missed days of school due to toothaches, and lower GPAs and graduation rates.

“There is a significant need for public health dentistry in Florida and solutions to promote dental care for underserved communities,” said Dr. Natalie Carr Bustillo, president of the FDA Foundation. “In addition to our annual *Florida Mission of Mercy* event, many Florida Dental Association member dentists provide free dental

treatments and oral health education in their communities year-round through *Project: Dentists Care*, Florida Donated Dental Services, and other volunteer programs.”

The state of Florida is the presenting sponsor for this year’s *Florida Mission of Mercy* with \$225,000 in funding provided in the FY 2021-22 budget to support this essential care for Floridians. This is the first *Mission of Mercy* event in the nation to receive state funding.

To help improve oral health for all Floridians, the Florida Dental Association (FDA) developed *Florida’s Action for Dental Health*, a comprehensive effort to address obstacles to dental care in Florida. This initiative includes efforts to expand public health dentistry, promote attainable care for the uninsured and underserved, and support and expand volunteer safety net programs like the *Florida Mission of Mercy*. A key effort championed by the Florida Dental Association is funding for Florida’s dental student loan repayment program, which will help participating dentists practice as Medicaid providers in rural and underserved areas. Funding for this program is currently included in the Florida Legislature’s 2022-23 budget.

“Everyone should have the opportunity to have good oral health, but too many Floridians face challenges in accessing routine dental care,” said Dr. David Boden, president of the Florida Dental Association. “Our state is helping, but we need comprehensive solutions that can be implemented now to help Florida’s more than 14,000 dentists immediately serve our rural and underserved communities.”

For more information, please visit www.FLAMOM.org

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About The Florida Dental Association Foundation

The Florida Dental Association Foundation (FDA Foundation) is the charitable arm of the Florida Dental Association (FDA), a statewide association representing Florida-licensed dentists. The mission of the FDA Foundation is to promote dental health for all Floridians. To learn more, visit www.floridadental.org/foundation.