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Florida Dental Association Applauds Florida Legislature for Prioritizing Oral Health During the 2022 Legislative Session

Florida legislators supported initiatives to increase access to routine dental care, protect Florida's Medicaid dental services program, and modernize Florida's dental licensure exam

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (March 14, 2022) – During the 2022 Florida legislative session, Florida legislators passed three key policies that will help promote access to routine dental care and improve oral health for Floridians.

The first is passing the funding to implement Florida's dental student loan repayment program and Donated Dental Services program. The dental student loan repayment program will help dentists practice in public health programs and serve low-income patients in designated rural and underserved areas. Florida's Donated Dental Services program connects volunteer dentists with seniors and individuals who have disabilities or are medically compromised, to provide comprehensive dental services – at no cost – in dentists' offices with support from volunteer dental labs to provide supplies like crowns and dental implants.

Florida is one of only five states without a dental student loan repayment program, and dentists graduate with student loan debt averaging from \$250,000 to \$400,000. Participating dentists may receive up to \$50,000 a year to help repay their loans and can serve in the program for up to five years. This program could be implemented within six months with this funding from the state, and in five years, 10 participating dentists would be able to treat at least one million Floridians.

"This funding will help improve the oral health, and resulting overall health, for all Floridians by giving dentists the opportunity to practice in areas where they are needed most, while meeting their often extensive student loan debt," said Dr. David Boden, president of the Florida Dental Association (FDA). "With this investment, Florida dentists can start helping thousands of patients in need this year through these two programs."

Secondly, the Florida Legislature helped protect dental care for Floridians participating in Florida's Medicaid program by keeping dental services separate from medical under Florida's Medicaid program. Maintaining the current structure of keeping dental separate will ensure more tax dollars go to dental care services – not the increased overhead costs that come with combining dental and medical plans.

“There are not a significant number of dental providers enrolled in Medicaid due to the low reimbursement rates in Florida,” said Dr. Jacinta Lamontagne, a practicing dentist in Pensacola and participating Medicaid provider. “Changing the current structure would create confusion and a more complicated system for patients and providers, which would lead to fewer providers participating in the program and decreased access for children, adults, and patients with special needs.”

Lastly, Florida legislators passed legislation to change the clinical portion of the state dental licensure exam from a live patient to the use of the non-patient, high-fidelity restorative human tooth simulation as administered by the Commission on Dental Competency Assessments. Currently, 47 other states accept this exam model.

“The Florida Dental Association thanks the Florida Legislature for prioritizing oral health through their support of these policies,” said Dr. Boden. “Oral health has far-reaching impacts on the overall health and well-being of our communities. By supporting solutions that promote access to routine dental services for all Floridians, we can make a lasting impact on people’s lives and futures.”

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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 floridadental.org.