



November 29, 2019

Rural and Underserved Communities Health Task Force  
Ways and Means Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1102 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington D.C. 20515

Representatives Davis, Sewell, Wenstrup, and Arrington:

Thank you for providing the opportunity for Delta Dental to share with you how we are working to address some of the most critical health care challenges facing America's rural and underserved communities, including access to oral health care for millions of children and adults, some of whom have never seen a dentist.

Across the nation, more than 80 million Americans trust Delta Dental to ensure they have access to the oral health care they need through our 39 member companies covering all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and other U.S. territories. Since its inception in 1954, and as the first company to specialize in dental benefits, Delta Dental has been a recognized leader in oral health, striving to ensure all Americans can have the healthy smile they deserve and live their healthiest lives. In fact, Delta Dental's dedication to improving access to care took the form of nearly \$79 million donated to over 1,700 programs in communities across the United States in 2018 to help address the critical need for greater access to oral health care.

**2. What successful models show a demonstrable, positive impact on health outcomes within rural or underserved communities, for example initiatives that address: a) social determinants of health (particularly transportation, housing instability, food insecurity); b) multiple chronic conditions; c) broadband access; or d) the use of telehealth/telemedicine/telemonitoring?**

Delta Dental member companies have found that patients are more likely to seek care if they are offered access points to providers in an atmosphere that is familiar and comfortable.

For example, The Delta Dental Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Delta Dental of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and North Carolina, recently provided \$200,000 to equip the dental clinic within The Schiff Wellness Center, located at the Academy of World Languages in Cincinnati, Ohio, to bring care directly to students through its Building Brighter Futures initiative. This funding provides dental care for the Academy's elementary and middle school children that can be accessed with a simple walk down the hall from their classroom. As a Federally Qualified Health Center, the Schiff Wellness Center also provides care for the rest of the community using a sliding pay scale.

Another example is Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation's Colorado Medical-Dental Integration Project (CO MDI) that integrates dental hygienists with medical care teams. CO MDI provides preventive oral health care in a familiar setting for patients who have not received care due to difficulties with insurance status, transportation and geographic barriers, or socioeconomic status.

Finally, the Delta Dental Community Care Foundation awarded a \$20,000 grant to El Centro de Corazón in Houston, Texas to support its dental program, which is aimed at improving oral health outcomes for low-income, uninsured/underinsured. Among other things, the funds will allow El Centro to enhance preventive oral health care by offsetting a portion of the salary of El Centro's bilingual Dental Home Patient Care Coordinator.

**6. What successful models show a demonstrable, positive impact on addressing workforce shortages in rural and underserved areas? What makes these models successful?**

Delta Dental knows how valuable dentists and other oral health care providers are in helping to ensure patients are getting proper care regardless of their income level or zip code. Having ready access to such providers is critical, particularly to societies' most vulnerable. Unfortunately, there are "dental deserts" - areas with fewer than one oral health professional for every 5,000 people<sup>1</sup> - in every state in the nation. As part of our commitment to ensuring all Americans have access to comprehensive health care, including oral care, we are committed to helping remove the financial barriers to educating the next generation of oral health providers and encouraging their involvement in underserved areas.

In 2018, Delta Dental Community Care Foundation provided a \$1 million Oral Health Education scholarship grant to Penn Dental Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Delta Dental's grant will endow, in perpetuity, two \$25,000 scholarships for students who plan to pursue service to vulnerable and underserved populations following graduation.

Additionally, the Delta Dental of Illinois Foundation provides scholarships to University of Illinois at Chicago College of Dentistry students and has provided grants to the university to modernize its facilities, including helping create a state-of-the art predoctoral pediatric dental clinic where over 400 dental students have trained since its dedication in 2009.

We also work to provide space for volunteer opportunities for dentists and dental students to serve their community. One such site is the Delta Dental of Arizona Oral Health Center at St. Vincent de Paul's Virginia G. Piper Dental Clinic. Thanks to the help of volunteer dentists and dental professionals, Delta Dental of Arizona is able to support the delivery of adult dental services, ranging from cleanings and fillings to extractions and denture fittings.

**7. Access to providers that address oral, behavioral, and substance use needs in rural and underserved communities can be particularly limited. What approaches have communities or states taken to address such gaps in care delivery?**

Delta Dental member companies are finding ways to fill the gaps in oral care with programming that brings the provider to communities in need.

One example is a program based in South Dakota. The Delta Dental Mobile Program provides oral health services to underserved children. The program includes two trucks, serving as mobile clinics, that provide preventive, diagnostic, and restorative care to kids across the state. Delta Dental manages, operates, and staffs the mobile trucks, and works with local community site partners to identify the children most in need of care who can least afford it. No patient is denied services due to inability to

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/dental-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

pay. To-date, the two trucks have visited 82 communities and provided more than \$21 million in dental care to 40,000 patients. Both trucks travel across the state an average of 40 weeks every year, serving approximately 3,000 children annually.

Delta Dental of Massachusetts also recently sponsored the UMass Dental Care Van, which provides medical and preventive dental services in 11 low-income neighborhoods and close to 20 city elementary schools in Worcester. Services provided include dental preventive care, sealants, and fluoride treatments. In 2018, the van provided 1,631 children with dental screenings, 1,334 children received sealants with 9,191 total sealants placed, and provided 4,677 children with fluoride treatments.

The Delta Dental of Oklahoma Foundation continues to co-produce the annual Oklahoma Mission of Mercy. Since 2010, Delta Dental of Oklahoma has given more than \$1 million to underwrite the event, thereby ensuring that more than 14,000 Oklahomans in need could receive dental care at no charge.

These are just some of the efforts and partnerships Delta Dental member companies support to improve oral health. We are happy to provide additional examples showcasing how Delta Dental member companies have addressed local oral health care needs across the country.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you would like any additional information, please contact Margo Klosterman at [mklosterman@deltadental.com](mailto:mklosterman@deltadental.com).

Sincerely,

Jason Daughn  
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