

Oral Health in North Dakota: Barriers and Solutions

Over the course of many years working toward providing quality care, the North Dakota Dental Association (NDDA) has identified barriers to care unique to North Dakota. Addressing these barriers while promoting disease prevention is an ongoing effort that requires a collaborative approach among the dental community, state government, public health entities and patients.

North Dakota-specific solutions should prioritize patient outreach and case management.

Areas of focus include:

1 Expand and support nonprofit clinics, outreach programs.

NDDA collaborates with 5 existing nonprofit clinics to recruit staff and provide low-cost dental care to patients throughout North Dakota.

NDDA collaborates with North Dakota's Oral Health Program for ongoing implementation of the school-based sealant program, Seal!ND, and long-term care facility outreach programs.

NDDA organized North Dakota's first "Mission of Mercy" in Sept. 2018. 110 dentists and 200 hygienists and assistants provided care for 916 patients over two days. Numerous other low/no-cost care programs are coordinated each year by NDDA and supported by ND dentists.

Grant funds could increase the number of ND Community Dental Health Coordinators, who connect patients to dental homes through case management.

2 Improve dental Medicaid.

To expand outreach, adopt existing teledentistry and case management codes for reimbursement in North Dakota.

Collaborative efforts needed to improve current MMIS claims system.

Recruit dental Medicaid providers through innovative marketing programs.

NDDA participates in ongoing quarterly meetings with Department of Human Services Medicaid officials to improve program administration.

Close gaps in cost of service versus adequate Medicaid fee reimbursement to encourage continued dentist participation.

3 Maximize existing dental team workforce.

An Expanded Restorative Functions Course would allow dental hygienists and assistants to perform expanded functions.

Dental loan repayment programs, created in part by NDDA, help recruit new dentists and encourage them to practice in underserved areas of the state.

A collaborative effort among NDDA, the North Dakota Dental Foundation and NDSCS is focused on recruiting and training in-demand dental assistants.

Teledentistry will allow dental hygienists in outreach settings to perform preventative care and connect high-risk patients to a dental home. A pilot program is underway.

4 Access to care for tribal communities.

NDDA led a national effort to simplify Indian Health Service credentialing, resulting in legislation to standardize credentialing protocol.

NDDA provides support for tribes electing "638" status to contract directly for dental workforce.

Ongoing collaboration with tribal communities connects them with local dentists and volunteer services.

For more information, visit

➔ www.smilenorthdakota.org