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REWRITING THE NARRATIVE OF CARE

Official Newsletter of the National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity

Advancing Access. Strengthening Workforce. Centering Equity.

ESTHER LOPEZ, DDS, MPH, FACD

The National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity proudly participated in the 2025 National Dental Therapy Conference (NDTC), held December 8–10 in Sacramento. The conference opened with civil rights leader Dolores Huerta (pictured, page 02), reminding attendees that oral health access is inseparable from justice.

Pictured below (left to right): Dr. Alejandro Narváez, Dr. Bruce Graham, Dr. Cheyanne Warren, Dr. Karl Self, Dr. Esther Lopez, Dr. Rachael Hogan, Dr. Misty Davis and Dr. Mary Williard



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“When a group of people get together, it’s collective power. You know that you’re doing it for the good.”

DOLORES HUERTA
Civil Rights Leader and
Champion for Social &
Economic Justice

NCDHE’s Assistant Director, Dr. Bruce Graham (pictured above to the left), joined leaders from Community Catalyst and the American Dental Therapy Association for the panel “Advancing Oral Health in Our Current Moment.” The session addressed federal and state policy challenges and highlighted dental therapy as a common-sense, cost-effective, bipartisan solution to workforce shortages and persistent inequities.

Coalition leaders contributed across multiple breakout sessions:

- In “Stackable Pathways: Advanced Standing & Career Ladders in Oral Health,” Dr. Cheyanne Warren of Skagit Valley College, and NCDHE President Elect, explored strategies for launching and expanding dental therapy programs to grow and diversify the workforce.
- In “Break the Mold: Reimagining Health Care and Higher Education,” Dr. Karl Self of the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry called for bold redesign of oral health delivery and degree pathways centered on access, affordability, and community.
- In “Pregnancy, Postpartum, and Oral Health,” Dr. Miranda Davis, Dental Consultant for the California Rural Indian Health Board, addressed evidence-based best practices for treating pregnant and postpartum patients — confronting provider discomfort and reinforcing the critical role of oral health in maternal health outcomes.

Across sessions, one message resonated: expanding access requires workforce innovation, policy courage, and clinical leadership grounded in equity. NCDHE was honored to present, to learn, and to stand alongside partners shaping the future of oral health. We remain committed to being active allies in advancing dental therapy and strengthening community-centered care nationwide.





From the President's Desk: Charting the Path Forward



On behalf of the National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity, I, as Principal Investigator, along with Co-Principal Investigator Allan Formicola, submitted a proposal to the ADEAGies Foundation to support the production of a report titled “The Future of Dental Therapy Education Programs.” I am pleased to announce that the proposal was accepted, and the project was funded in June 2025, with the report scheduled for completion by June 2026. David Maywhoor serves as the project administrator.

The author team for this initiative includes Dr. Don Chi from the University of Washington; Dr. Sarah Shoffstall-Cone from the program in Alaska; Dr. Karl Self from the University of Minnesota; Ms. Colleen Brickel from Minnesota State University; Dr. Chyeanne Warren from Skagit Valley College in Washington; Ms. Theresa Raglin from Ferris State University in Michigan; and Ms. Misty Davis from the Michigan Primary Care Association.

Ferris State University is currently in the process of developing a dental therapy education program. The Michigan Primary Care Association has initiated an innovative scholarship-supported initiative for out-of-state dental therapy students, resulting in the graduation of two individuals who are now practicing in Michigan. Furthermore, during the 2026 ADEA Annual Meeting in Montreal, a session will be held to discuss this report. This session is particularly significant as the ADEA has yet to formally recognize dental therapy educators or establish a designated space within its membership structure for them.

The report is nearing completion, with Allan and me collaborating on the front-end and back-end summary and conclusion sections. We are also coordinating the details regarding how the ADEAGies Foundation will disseminate the report. The Coalition will play an active role in its release and distribution. Throughout the report's development, Allan and I identified additional related issues that warrant consideration and resolution, which the report will help illuminate. In this context, we are exploring the potential for subsequent funded projects aimed at addressing these issues. This initiative exemplifies the Coalition's commitment to advancing health equity in areas that others may overlook.

Caswell A. Evans, Jr., DDS, MPH
President, National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity



NCDHE Begins Planning for a Center for Medical–Dental Integration Across the Lifespan

BY: DR. TAMMY BUTTON, DDS, MSD, FACD, FICD



The National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity (NCDHE) has launched a planning effort to establish a Center for Medical–Dental Integration Across the Lifespan, aimed at advancing whole-person care through stronger collaboration between medical and dental providers.

Building on the success of the 2025 UPenn School of Dental Medicine/NCDHE webinar series Oral Health in Transition: Charting a Collaborative Path Forward, the proposed Center will focus on moving beyond why integration matters to providing practical guidance on how integrated care can be implemented in everyday practice. Planned activities include developing implementation-ready practice blueprints and convening medical–dental teams to share strategies for building sustainable, integrated care models. This initiative is just getting underway, and NCDHE welcomes interest from those who would like to participate.

Contact Dr. Tammy Button (dr.button@southshoreskippingstones.org) to learn more.

POLICY & WORKFORCE WATCH

HRSA Expands Workforce Funding—Now Includes Dental Therapists

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) has released a new funding opportunity for the State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP)—a major workforce initiative that helps states recruit and retain clinicians in Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs).

This program provides federal funding to repay educational loans for providers who commit to serving in underserved communities, strengthening access to care where it is needed most.

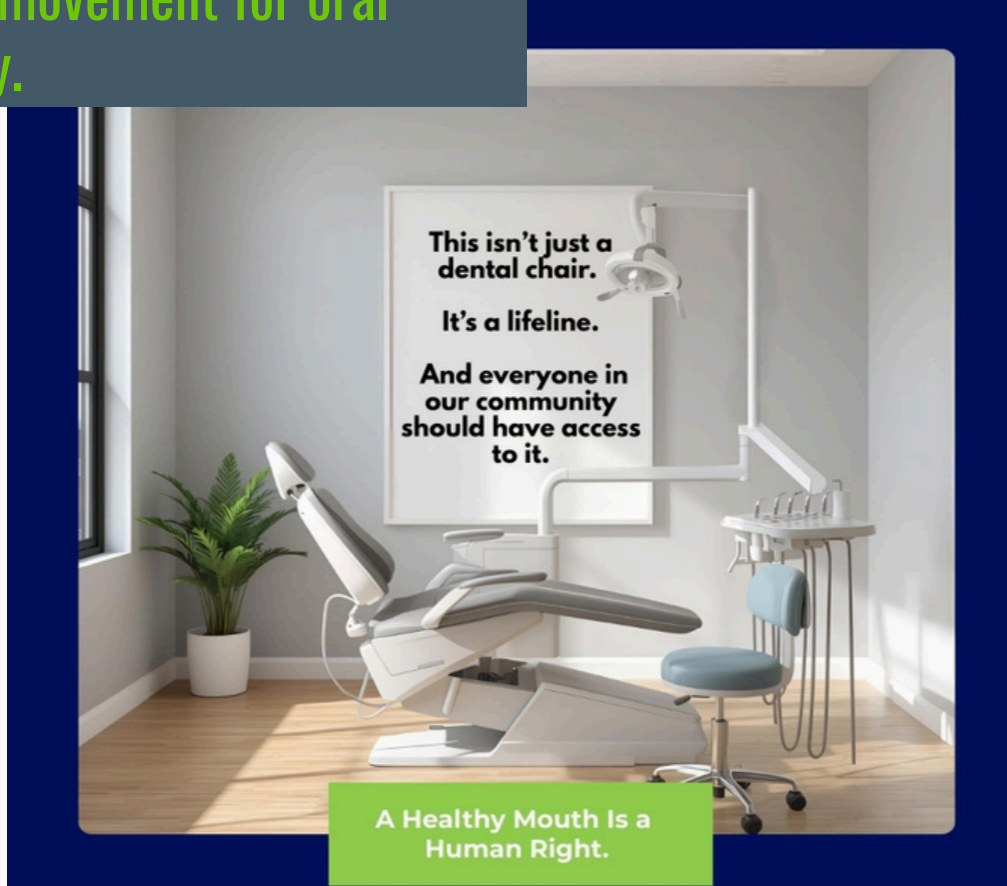
Importantly, the FY2026 announcement expands eligible disciplines to include dental therapists and registered dietitians, recognizing the growing importance of team-based care in addressing health disparities.

HRSA anticipates awarding up to \$20 million nationwide to support state programs through 2029. Learn more by reviewing the full funding announcement:

[CLINICIANS' ELIGIBILITY AND APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR THE STATE LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM](#)



Support the movement for oral health equity.



NCDHE's work is powered by partners who believe oral health is a matter of justice. From advancing equitable policy to strengthening community centered care, we are committed to building a more just and accountable oral health system nationwide.

To make an individual donation or explore sponsorship opportunities, please visit:

[National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity](#)

For partnership inquiries or to discuss sponsorship directly, please contact:

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We welcome mission-aligned individuals and organizations to stand with us in advancing oral health equity.