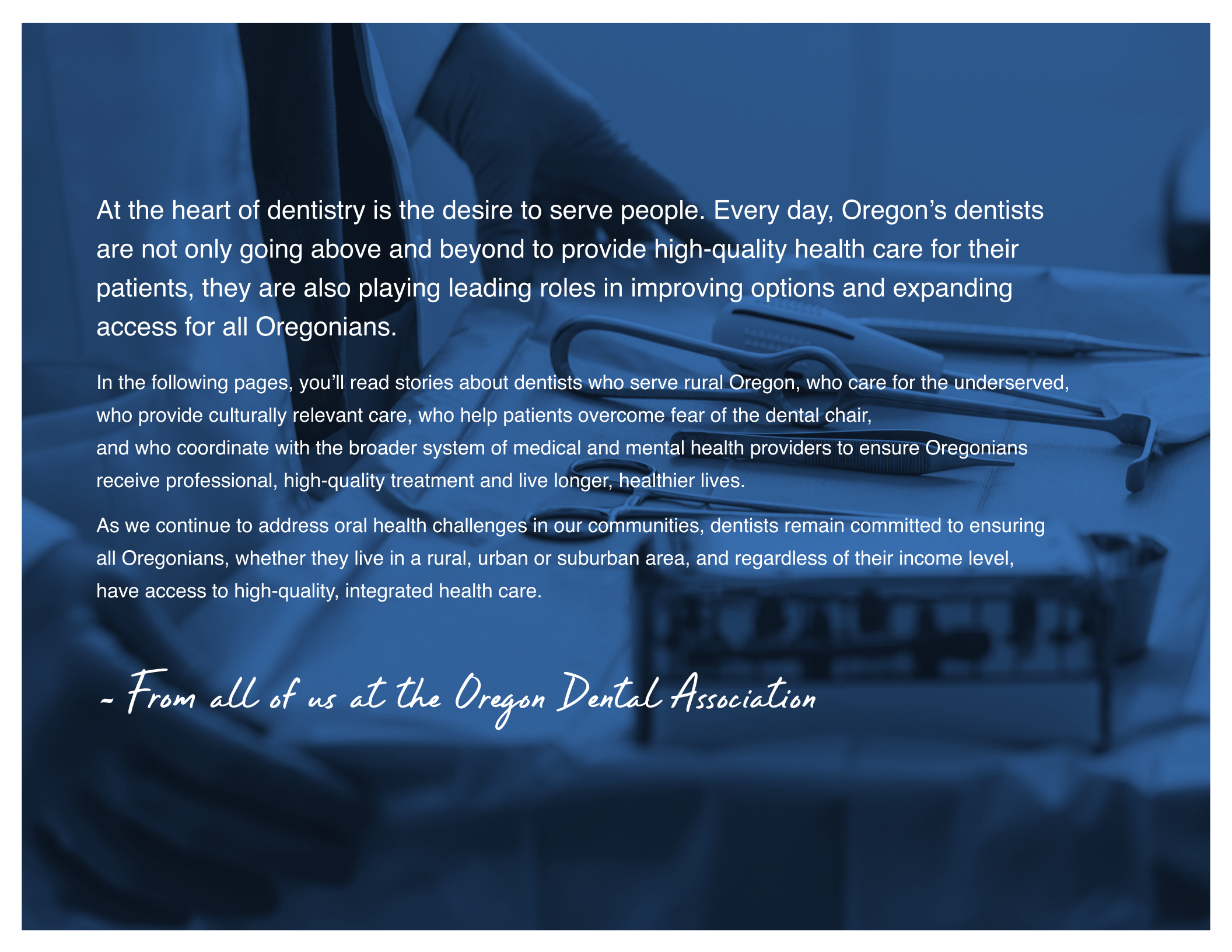


# Oregon Dentists



Expanding  
access to  
care for all





At the heart of dentistry is the desire to serve people. Every day, Oregon's dentists are not only going above and beyond to provide high-quality health care for their patients, they are also playing leading roles in improving options and expanding access for all Oregonians.

In the following pages, you'll read stories about dentists who serve rural Oregon, who care for the underserved, who provide culturally relevant care, who help patients overcome fear of the dental chair, and who coordinate with the broader system of medical and mental health providers to ensure Oregonians receive professional, high-quality treatment and live longer, healthier lives.

As we continue to address oral health challenges in our communities, dentists remain committed to ensuring all Oregonians, whether they live in a rural, urban or suburban area, and regardless of their income level, have access to high-quality, integrated health care.

*- From all of us at the Oregon Dental Association*



# Dr. Stacy Geisler

## Women in Oregon's dental workforce are on the rise

When Dr. Stacy Geisler moved to Oregon and contacted the Board of Dentistry about becoming licensed to practice, she learned she would become the first woman to be a board-certified oral and maxillofacial surgeon in the state.

"I was surprised and shocked that I was the only one," Dr. Geisler said. "But since then, there have been more of us who have either come to Oregon or received our training here."

When she entered the workforce in the early 1990s, less than 1 percent of oral and maxillofacial surgeons were women. Today, that number is closer to 7 percent. For women in a profession long dominated by men, Dr. Geisler said, "We're kind of pioneers."

Oral and maxillofacial surgeons not only complete dental school. They also spend additional time training in medical residency programs for surgery.

Dr. Geisler put herself through college by working as a firefighter for the California Department of Forestry. She has a Doctor of Dental Surgery degree and a Ph.D. in epidemiology, and has completed a residency in oral and maxillofacial surgery as well as a post-doctoral fellowship at the National Institutes of Health.

Advanced education and training enable Dr. Geisler to bridge the gap between medical and dental treatment to provide the best care possible for patients at her practice in Lake Oswego. They also allow her to experience truly rewarding relationships with her patients, many of whom have deeply complex needs and medical histories.

"People are really frightened when they come to see us," she said. "Especially with many of the kids I work with, there are a lot of challenges with handling the patient and earning their trust. It's really encouraging when you help them and they're no longer afraid of the dentist."



*"We're kind of pioneers."*

—DR. STACY GEISLER





# Dr. Patrick Hagerty

## Seeing the big picture through integrated health care

As one of Oregon's few active hospital dentists, a designation that requires training in a hospital environment, Dr. Patrick Hagerty regularly finds himself at the intersection of dental and medical care.

He is working with the American Cancer Society and the Oregon Pacific Area Health Education Center on education programs around human papillomavirus, a sexually transmitted infection that, untreated, can cause cervical, throat and oral cancer.

Dr. Hagerty is a proponent of the HPV vaccine, which – thanks to legislation the ODA supported in 2019 – Oregon dentists can now administer to their patients, along with other immunizations like flu shots.

“We’re working to educate the public, talking especially about the vaccine, which prevents those cancers,” Dr. Hagerty said.

Dr. Hagerty is in private practice in Albany. He also helped to restart the General Practice Residency at Oregon Health & Science University in Portland. At OHSU, he became involved in the head and neck cancer team, helping with cancer reconstruction.

He also continued to develop a deep understanding of the systemic implications of medical problems, something he says is very important for all dentists to continue to appreciate.

“It’s understanding the full picture – the big picture of the patient,” said Dr. Hagerty.

“For the general public, whatever their experience has been with a dentist, whether it’s a cleaning, a filling or implant, it’s a pretty benign experience,” he said. “But when you start talking about cancer, people are more serious, and it drives home the idea that the mouth is part of the body and we need to look at the whole integrated model.”



*“We need to look at the whole integrated model.”*

–DR. PATRICK HAGERTY



# Dr. Eddie Ramirez

## Serving underserved communities

From the time Dr. Eddie Ramirez was 8 years old, he knew he wanted to be a dentist.

When he was visiting his birthplace in Mexico, his aunt had just finished her dental training. Seeing her work with the community inspired him to pursue the same profession, first through a high school charter program, where he earned his dental assistant certification, and later at Oregon Health & Science University's School of Dentistry.

Dr. Ramirez works at the Virginia Garcia Dental Clinic in Washington County. Through a scholarship from the Scholars for a Healthy Oregon Initiative, he has committed to five years of public health service, serving communities who might otherwise face barriers to oral health care.

Working at Virginia Garcia was an easy decision. An immigrant himself, Dr. Ramirez said the clinic's work and mission lined up well with his values and the vision of the Oregon Dental Association, which supported him every step of the way.

"Their philosophy connected to my life story," Dr. Ramirez said. "I've always had a passion for public health and serving underserved communities. ... I am treating the Hispanic community here at Virginia Garcia. This is the community I come from, and this is what makes my story unique."

Outside of the clinic, Dr. Ramirez co-chairs the ODA's New Dentist Council, where he connects with current dental students, works on issues affecting recent graduates and coordinates a network supporting new practicing dentists.

With many new dentists going into public health or corporate dentistry, there has been a shift in demographics, with more women and minorities joining dentistry – something Dr. Ramirez is excited to see.

"I want to keep seeing the change in demographics in dentistry and the change in equity," Dr. Ramirez said. "That's where we're headed, and I'd like to see the dental schools have more equity in gender and diversity."



*"I'd like to see the dental schools have more equity in gender and diversity."*

—DR. EDDIE RAMIREZ





## Giving back through pediatric dentistry

Born in a Malaysian refugee camp, pediatric dentist Dr. Hai Pham immigrated to the United States in 1980. His path to helping others was inspired by a dentist who provided care for his family.

“He always made me feel special and made a big difference in my life,” said Dr. Pham. “As I got older and joined the dental profession, I realized he had been doing all of this pro bono work for my family.”

Dr. Pham fully realized the importance of charitable care when the director of the Knight Cancer Institute developed a new target therapy drug that treated his cancer. “He was able to find a way to get my medication for free and saved my life,” Dr. Pham said. “That’s part of what led me to how I practice now – realizing how tough it is for individuals who don’t have access to care.”

In addition to pro bono work, Dr. Pham practices in Beaverton and Hillsboro. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Dental Foundation of Oregon, on the Oregon Board of Dentistry and has participated in mission trips with Give Hope – Give a Hand, which provides prosthetics to people who have lost hands to land mines, accidents or birth defects.

“It’s important to me to be able to give back,” Dr. Pham said. “I want to ensure we’re getting care to the kids who need it.”

*“It’s important  
to me to be able to  
give back.”*

—  
DR. HAI PHAM

## Rebuilding smiles for Oregon families

When training to become a dentist, Dr. Judah Garfinkle went to Bolivia with Operation Smile, a nonprofit organization that helps children affected by cleft lip and palate. During that trip, his team delivered over 100 surgeries in just a few days. “It was a very moving and powerful experience,” Dr. Garfinkle said.

It was a desire to help others and work with his hands that attracted Dr. Garfinkle to dentistry. The Director of Craniofacial Orthodontics at Doernbecher Children’s Hospital in Portland, Dr. Garfinkle also has a private practice and is the co-founder of Smile Oregon, a nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that every Oregon family affected by cleft and craniofacial conditions has access to the coordinated care they deserve.

“Most people associate the need for the work we do with other countries, but children are born with cleft and craniofacial conditions right here in our backyard and struggle to receive the care they need,” he said. “The good news is that we know what to do, how to do it, and when to do it, and we can pretty much erase a cleft before the child is off to college.”

Since 2008, Smile Oregon has gone beyond surgical procedures to focus on all aspects of patient care from birth to adulthood, including specialized baby bottles, speech therapy, final restorative dental work and everything in between. Some families have been a part of Smile Oregon for a decade and represent Dr. Garfinkle’s goal of empowering patients to reach their highest potential and lead fulfilling, independent lives.

“There are not too many positive things about getting older, but one is getting to be on this amazing journey with these children and their families,” Dr. Garfinkle said. “It makes all my work worth it.”



# Dr. Kim Wright

## Promoting wellness for patients and dentists alike

When Dr. Kim Wright found out a friend and colleague was struggling with mental health issues, she immediately tried to find him help.

“When someone asks for help, you might only have one opportunity before that person is gone,” said Dr. Wright, who now is among Oregon dentists looking beyond their own clinics to innovate and support their peers.

Through the Oregon Dental Association’s Wellness Committee, Dr. Wright has championed an initiative in which the ODA collaborates with other groups such as the Oregon Medical Association, Oregon Psychological Association and Oregon Health & Science University wellness program to share existing resources.

“That’s where my passion for mental wellness really developed,” she said. “The idea is to create a safety net that’s much larger than we’ve had in the past.”

She has also recruited 30 ambassadors from across the state to help their peers with a wide range of issues many dental providers face, from burnout to addiction, to the stress of a lawsuit or HIPAA violation beyond a doctor’s control.

Dr. Wright cares deeply about mental wellness in part because she sees firsthand the benefits of integrated care for overall health in her own office, in West Linn, each day.

Dr. Wright has also been involved with the Academy of General Dentistry’s efforts to create a new clinic where dentists, including specialists, combine learning opportunities with public service to help people in need.

“It’s unique that the Oregon Dental Association is helping the Oregon Academy of General Dentistry set up a facility that we can all benefit from,” she said. “We have all worked really cohesively to improve oral health in Oregon, and that is not the case in all states.”



*“When someone asks for help, you might only have one opportunity.”*

—DR. KIM WRIGHT





# Dr. Tyrel Finmor

## Providing care in rural Oregon

The challenge of practicing dentistry in a rural community is one Dr. Tyrel Finmor welcomes.

Working at SandCreek Dental, a family practice in Tillamook, Dr. Finmor loves caring for multiple generations in a small town. His office accepts patients on the Oregon Health Plan, furthering the Oregon Dental Association's goal of expanding local access to dental services.

Dr. Finmor is passionate about expanding education around oral health. Every day, he sees the barriers his patients have faced. In addition to concerns about cost, many patients are either afraid of the dentist or afraid of judgment.

"I feel like there are a lot of things that go into that, including generational poverty and a lack of dental knowledge," Dr. Finmor said.

Finding dental specialists, such as orthodontists and surgeons who accept Medicaid, can also pose a challenge in rural areas.

"Sometimes that stretches us to find a way for us to provide the care they need here," Dr. Finmor said. "I always tell my patients, 'This is a judgment-free zone, and let's just work on getting you to the point where you are happy and smiling.'"

Outside of dentistry, his passion for caring for others extends to furry friends. Dr. Finmor and his husband breed, raise and show rabbits. In addition to being an ODA member, he's a member of the American Rabbit Breeders Association.

Just over a year into his dental career, Dr. Finmor is thinking of ways dentistry could continue to evolve for the better. He'd love to see it become easier for dentists to work with insurance, for one. But there's another positive shift in dentistry he already sees happening.

"I love that we are seeing more women and people of color and more diverse dentists and dental students," Dr. Finmor said.



*"I always tell my patients, 'This is a judgment-free zone.'"*

—DR. TYREL FINMOR





## Breaking down barriers

A recent graduate of Oregon Health & Science University's School of Dentistry, Dr. Thien-Y Hoang sees many of her own experiences reflected in her patients. She works at a Federally Qualified Health Center in Salem called Lancaster Family Health, which serves a large population of migrant farm workers.

An immigrant herself, Dr. Hoang every day sees the value of high-quality, integrated care for her patients.

"I am breaking down the barriers of health disparity," she said. "Sometimes people end up in the ER because they don't have dental insurance; it costs thousands of dollars because they had a barrier they couldn't overcome. Because my clinic exists, I can help close that gap."

Serving close to 4,000 patients with a range of needs, Dr. Hoang feels the clinic suits her well as a young dentist, because she can hone her skills while utilizing her medical training.

"My hospital training has helped me to communicate effectively with other providers," she said. "If I am providing dental care to a patient with diabetes or on dialysis, I can talk to their medical provider to come up with a plan to safely provide care. It's about looking at the big picture."

*"I am breaking down the barriers of health disparity"*

DR. THIEN-Y HOANG



## Dr. Seijin Kim

## Connecting across cultures to support patients

Early in her career, Dr. Seijin Kim is already thinking about how she can make a bigger impact in dentistry and for patients.

"I am fluent in Korean and Spanish," said Dr. Kim, who works at East Periodontics in Gresham and Portland. "I think that helps patients who don't speak the majority language to be able to really communicate with the provider and truly understand what we are doing to help them."

Young dentists with diverse backgrounds and experiences represent a growing segment of Oregon's dental workforce.

Dr. Kim first became interested in dentistry on a service trip to Cambodia, where she met a girl who wouldn't smile because she was embarrassed by her teeth. She also traveled to Ecuador, and later focused her thesis on nutrition and pregnancy and the associated impact on rural dental care in Latin America. The trips put the importance of dental care in perspective for Dr. Kim.

"I've always had regular dental care, and it's something I personally took for granted," she said. "But access to good oral health care truly can be life changing."

Her approach to communicating with patients today is also influenced by her own family.

"Growing up with parents that spoke English, but it wasn't their predominant language, you see a lot of head nodding and agreeing, but you know they don't truly understand," said Dr. Kim. "The staff at my new clinic is already very diverse. I think it is nice to be able to offer this to the patient, and it makes the patient more comfortable."



# Leaders in Oregon's Oral Health

When it comes to expanding access to care, Oregon dentists are at the forefront. Our goal is to ensure all Oregonians have access to high-quality, professional dental care.



OHSU dental students train to administer vaccines, including to Dr. Phillip Marucha (bottom photo), dean of OHSU's School of Dentistry.

## Providing Integrated Care for Oregonians

In 2019, Oregon dentists became the first in their profession nationwide to win the ability to provide vaccines to their patients, expanding access to lifesaving immunizations for Oregonians. From private practices to Dental Care Organizations, from large corporations to small groups of providers, Oregon dentists continue leading the way to better health outcomes across the state.

### Vaccines

Empowering dentists to administer vaccines to patients will help reduce the incidence of flu and slow the spread of human papillomavirus (HPV), ultimately reducing rates of oral and throat cancers. Dr. Patrick Hagerty, a dentist who helped the American Cancer Society develop education programs around HPV, cares deeply about comprehensive health care. "It's understanding the full picture – the big picture of the patient," he said. "We need to look at the whole integrated model."

### Diabetes Screenings

The ODA also won an expansion in Oregonians' access to diabetes screenings, ensuring an increasing number of dentists identify and offer tests to at-risk patients. With 287,000 Oregonians living with diabetes, and more than 1 million more at risk of developing the disease, early identification and awareness can save millions of dollars in treatment costs.



## Breaking Down Barriers and Building Connections to Lifelong Dental Care

In 2019, the Oregon Dental Association helped sponsor a pilot project in Washington County to improve oral health care through Community Dental Health Coordinators (CDHCs). CDHCs are recruited from the communities where they will work, eliminating language, cultural and trust barriers while supporting access to preventive care and helping patients navigate to dental clinics for treatment.



Dora Sandoval is Oregon's first Community Dental Health Coordinator, a rapidly growing field in more than 20 states nationwide.

## Serving Rural Oregon and the Underserved

Today, an estimated 42 percent of Oregon dentists see patients on Medicaid, but we know access remains a challenge for others. Oregon dentists continue to advocate for the state's Rural Health Practitioner Tax Credit, which has helped thousands of health care providers practice in rural areas, as well as Scholars for a Healthy Oregon, which encourages recent dental school grads to serve the public. The ODA also facilitated a Tribal Summit for dental practitioners and continues discussions with Oregon's tribes about ensuring equitable access to professional oral health care.

## Caring for Kids and Giving Back

For 40 years, dentists have supported programs in public schools, provided charitable care and coordinated resources for Oregon's children and vulnerable communities through the Dental Foundation of Oregon. In that time, **\$10 million worth of services** have been provided through direct funding and volunteer resources.

### Tooth Taxi

The Tooth Taxi, launched in 2008, travels the state providing dental care and education to children.

- **12 years** on the road
- **75,000+** miles traveled
- **22,475 students** screened
- **13,118 appointments** in the van
- **23,945 students** received oral hygiene classroom education
- **\$7,591,851 worth** of free dental care provided



(Left) Dr. Sita Ping cares for a patient in the Dental Foundation of Oregon's Tooth Taxi, which travels the state providing dental care and education to children.

(Right) The Tooth Taxi has provided \$7.6 million in free dental care since 2008.





*“Excellent dental health requires high-quality care, and all Oregonians, whether in urban, suburban or rural areas, deserve access to professional dentists.”*

DR. CALIE ROA | ODA BOARD OF TRUSTEES, SOUTHERN OREGON DENTAL SOCIETY

The Oregon Dental Association represents over 2,300 dentists across the state, with members in every Oregon county. Our members work in a diverse range of settings, from private practices to Dental Care Organizations, from large corporations to small groups and organizations.

[oregondental.org](http://oregondental.org)