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“Very powerful seminar. The included handout is a helpful tool for future planning.” **Natalia Kokoreva, Milwaukie, Oregon**

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*Membership Matters* is an official publication of the Oregon Dental Association in support of its core purpose to advance the dental profession and promote the highest standard of oral health and oral health care.

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# Bread & Butter – The Advocacy Version



By Alayna Schoblaske

**WHEN WE TALK ABOUT BREAD AND BUTTER** dentistry, a few things come to mind: class one and two composite restorations, single-unit crowns, and preventive basics like prophies, fluoride varnish, and oral hygiene instruction. When we talk about advocacy, one bread and butter topic that comes to mind is Medicaid. Like our restorative and preventive basics, we don't usually spend much time or energy thinking about this topic, and yet, it is fundamental to the backdrop of our profession.

And then, here we are in 2025. All of a sudden, Medicaid has sprung into the foreground. Next month (I'm writing this in late June), the Senate is poised to vote on a 10-year budget that currently includes funding cuts to Medicaid.

And so I'm using this editorial to state as plainly as I can what I know about the current state of Medicaid, and to encourage you to educate yourself and others about it as well.

In Oregon, Medicaid is called Oregon Health Plan (OHP). Every state has a different name for its Medicaid program...it's Apple Health in Washington, Medi-Cal in California, DenaliCare in Alaska, Idaho Health Plan Plus in Idaho, and more. OHP provides medical, dental, vision, and behavioral health coverage to children and adults with a low income. Household income limits are admittedly somewhat complicated, and based on the Federal Poverty Level. They are lowest for single adults, higher for pregnant people, and highest for children. For example, in 2025, a single adult must earn less than \$21,600 annually to qualify for OHP. A pregnant person with a spouse and two other children can

have a household income of \$61,092 annually. (Pregnant people are covered during their pregnancy and for 6 months after the baby is delivered.) A child in that household would have coverage as long as their parents made \$98,064 annually or less.<sup>1</sup>

In Oregon, Medicaid covers most preventive and direct restorative dental procedures as well as most extractions, some root canals, some dentures, and, in rare circumstances, orthodontic treatment. There is no annual limit or cap on dental services, but some patients are covered under a capitated plan where the provider receives a flat fee per year regardless of the type or number of services that the patient received.

As of April 2025, 34% of Oregon's population is enrolled in OHP, including 59% of children. Malheur County has the highest percentage of overall enrollment, with 54% of their residents using OHP. On the other hand, Benton County has the lowest enrollment at 23%.<sup>2</sup> The number of dentists in Oregon that treat patients with OHP is similar to the number of patients with OHP – 32% of dentists accept OHP.<sup>3</sup> However, this data is from 2017 and is likely outdated.

Medicaid programs are funded by both state and federal dollars. In Oregon, that split ranges from 59-90% federal funding (sometimes also called a federal match).<sup>4</sup> Because a majority of OHP relies on federal funding, changes in the federal budget could have a large impact on Oregon's ability to continue to provide the same level of coverage.

Finally, a word on reimbursement. One of the chronic challenges facing dentists that accept OHP – or Medicaid in any state – is reimbursement. In 2024,

the national average for adult Medicaid fee-for-service reimbursement is 49.8% of average private insurance payment rates.<sup>5</sup> Of course, though, each state has its own reimbursement rate. The highest rate is Maryland at 87.3% of private insurance rates; the lowest is New Hampshire at 16.8%. Oregon is toward the middle with 36.3% reimbursement.<sup>5</sup> Due to the current landscape of potential funding cuts, it is unlikely that these reimbursement rates will increase anytime soon, but it is an important conversation to continue to have to ensure that dentists can continue to provide care for patients with Medicaid.

The ADA and ODA are actively engaged in advocacy nationally and in Oregon to protect Medicaid funding. Our voice is made stronger by your voice. Educate yourself. Talk to your patients, family, and neighbors. Call or write your members of Congress. Get involved with ODA's Legislative Action Team. To quote Mr. Knight...just do something! 🗣️

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# Events & Education

## Component CE Calendar

CONTINUING  
EDUCATION

Calendar provided by Mehdi Salari, DMD

This calendar is current as of July 18, 2025

Please visit the host dental society website for the most up-to-date information.

Date	Dental Society	Course or Event Title	Speaker	CE	Location	More Information
09/12/25	Coastal Cascades	The Esthetic & Long Term Considerations of Cementation & Material Choice	Dr. An (Sponsored by Unbreakable Bonds)	4	Eugene – Valley River Inn	Register: <a href="http://www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE">www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE</a>
09/13/25	Coastal Cascades	Oral Cancer Foundation Walk/Run	-	-	Corvallis – Willamette Park	<a href="https://ocf.donordrive.com/event/oregon">https://ocf.donordrive.com/event/oregon</a>
09/18/25	Southern Oregon	Advanced Techniques for Full Arch Cases	Nobel Biocare	2	Margaritaville – Medford	<a href="mailto:sodentalsociety@gmail.com">sodentalsociety@gmail.com</a>
09/18/25	Multi-Component	Fall Kick-Off Tailgater	-	-	Wilsonville – ODA Office Parking Lot	Info/Register: <a href="http://www.multnomahdental.org">www.multnomahdental.org</a>
09/23/25	Coastal Cascades	Fall Dentist Social	Sponsored by Columbia Healthcare Banking	-	Eugene – TBD	Register: <a href="http://www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE">www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE</a>
09/25/25	Clackamas	Arcade Challenge Fall Social	-	-	Dave & Busters	
10/09/25	Coastal Cascades	Contemporary Approach to Dental Implant Maintenance for Long-term Success	Lynn Peneck RDH MS (Sponsored by Nobel Biocare)	2	Hybrid – Eugene – Lane Community College	Register: <a href="http://www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE">www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE</a>
10/11/25	Multnomah	ODA House of Delegates Component Gathering	-	-	TBD	Info/Register: <a href="http://www.multnomahdental.org">www.multnomahdental.org</a>
10/16/25	Southern Oregon	Dental Emergencies	Dr. Rajagopal	2	West Ortho Medford	<a href="mailto:sodentalsociety@gmail.com">sodentalsociety@gmail.com</a>
10/23/25	Coastal Cascades	Digital Work Flows in Implant Dentistry	Dr. An (Sponsored by Unbreakable Bonds)	2	Albany Golf and Event Center	Register: <a href="http://www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE">www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE</a>
11/13/25	Southern Oregon	Fee Schedule Evaluation 38% back	Benco Dental	2	West Ortho Medford	<a href="mailto:sodentalsociety@gmail.com">sodentalsociety@gmail.com</a>
11/13/25	Multnomah & Washington County	New Dentist Social	-	-	Grand Central Bowl	Info/Register: <a href="http://www.multnomahdental.org">www.multnomahdental.org</a>
12/04/25	Coastal Cascades	Hands-On Stain & Glaze: Chairside Techniques to Set your Practice Apart	Max Thomas (Sponsored by GC)	2	Albany Golf and Event Center	Register: <a href="http://www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE">www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE</a>
12/05/25	Coastal Cascades	Hands-On Stain & Glaze: Chairside Techniques to Set your Practice Apart	Max Thomas (sponsored by GC)	2	Eugene – Lane Community College	Register: <a href="http://www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE">www.bit.ly/LCDSEVENTBRITE</a>
01/21/26	Multnomah	CE & Wine Tasting	WEO Media	2	TBD	Info/Register: <a href="http://www.multnomahdental.org">www.multnomahdental.org</a>
02/07/26	Multnomah	Give Kids a Smile	-	-	Powell Butte Elementary	Info/Register: <a href="http://www.multnomahdental.org">www.multnomahdental.org</a>

Find this calendar online at [www.oregondental.org](http://www.oregondental.org). Click “Meetings & Events” > “Calendar of Events”.

Looking for additional ways to get CE? The American Dental Association has a large collection of webinars and on-demand video learning opportunities available, many of which are free to members. Visit [adaceonline.org](http://adaceonline.org) to catch up on the latest offerings on your own schedule. 🎧

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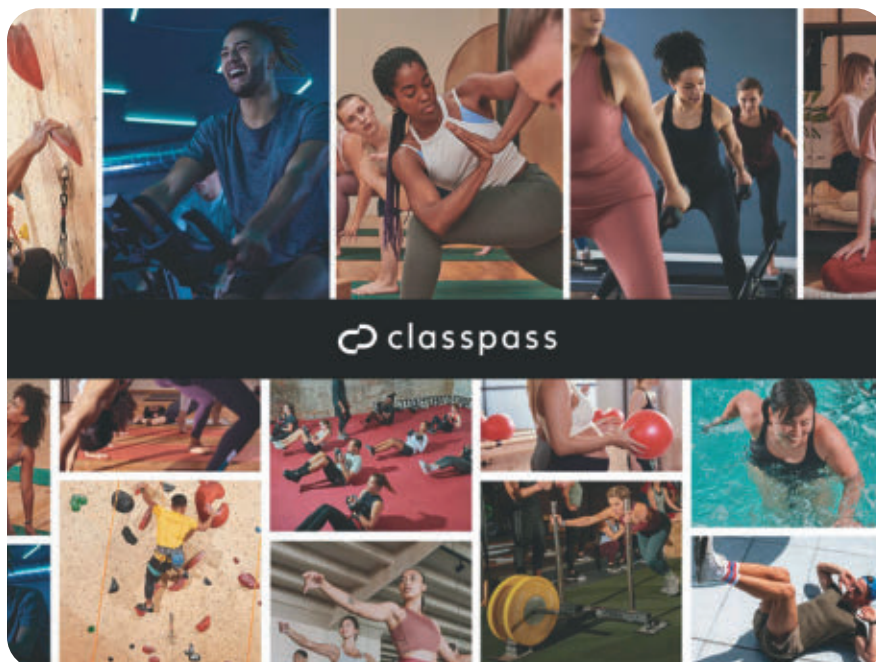
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# Unlocking the Power of Organized Dentistry: A Guide for New Dentists

FEATURE

**EMBARKING ON A DENTAL CAREER IS BOTH** exciting and challenging. For new dentists – those within the first decade of practice – navigating the complexities of clinical excellence, business management, and professional development can be overwhelming. Fortunately, organized dentistry offers a wealth of resources designed to support and empower early-career professionals. This article explores the invaluable tools and opportunities available through the American Dental Association (ADA) and the Oregon Dental Association (ODA), with a focus on the ADA Member Advantage program.

## The Value of Organized Dentistry

Organized dentistry encompasses the collaborative efforts of dental professionals through associations like the ADA and ODA. Membership in these organizations provides access to a myriad of benefits, including:

- **Advocacy:** Representation in legislative matters affecting the dental profession.
- **Education:** Continuing education opportunities to enhance clinical skills and knowledge.
- **Networking:** Connections with peers and mentors to foster professional growth.

- **Resources:** Access to tools and services that streamline practice management and personal well-being.

By engaging in organized dentistry, new dentists can build a solid foundation for a successful and fulfilling career.

## American Dental Association (ADA): A Comprehensive Resource

The ADA stands as a pillar of support for dental professionals across the United States. For new dentists, the ADA offers a suite of resources tailored to the unique challenges faced in the early years of practice.

### 1. New Dentist Learning Networks

ADA's New Dentist Learning Networks provide a platform for early-career dentists to engage in focused study groups. These networks cover diverse topics, including oral surgery, and offer:

- **Expert-led Sessions:** Presentations by seasoned dental educators.
- **Continuing Education Credits:** Opportunities to earn CE credits.
- **Peer Interaction:** Virtual meetings to discuss cases and share experiences.

- **Global Networking:** Connections with new dentists worldwide. Participation in these networks not only enhances clinical knowledge but also fosters a sense of community among peers.

### 2. ADA Member Advantage Program

The ADA Member Advantage program offers significant savings on a wide range of products and services essential for both personal and professional life. According to the 2024 "Add It Up" brochure, members can access over \$89,500 in potential savings. Highlights include:

- **Technology Discounts:** Savings on computers and office equipment through partnerships with companies like Lenovo.
- **Financial Services:** Exclusive rates on credit card processing and student loan refinancing.
- **Health and Wellness:** Discounts on fitness programs, emergency medical kits, and wellness resources.
- **Office Supplies:** Reduced prices on apparel and branded gear for dental staff.

These benefits can substantially reduce overhead costs and enhance the efficiency of dental practices.



ODA STAFF



TEAL ROSE PHOTO

### 3. Mentorship and Career Support

Transitioning from dental school to professional practice can be daunting. Being involved with the ADA exposes new dentists to hundreds of potential mentors. Additionally, resources such as the Chairside Instructor guide offer practical advice on navigating the early stages of a dental career.

### 4. Wellness Resources

Recognizing the stresses associated with the dental profession, the ADA offers wellness resources to support mental and physical health. Initiatives include:

- **Mental Health Webinars:** Educational sessions on recognizing and addressing mental health issues.
- **Stress Management Tools:** Techniques like box breathing to manage stress. ADA members have free access to Talkspace Go, a self-guided mental health app.
- **Fitness Programs:** Access to fitness classes and wellness programs through partnerships with services like ClassPass. These resources aim to promote a balanced and healthy lifestyle for dental professionals.

### Oregon Dental Association (ODA): Local Support and Engagement

As a new dentist in Oregon, membership in the ODA provides localized support and opportunities to engage with the dental community within the state.

### 1. Member Center

The ODA's Member Center serves as a hub for resources and services, including:

- **Publications:** Access to newsletters and updates pertinent to Oregon dentists.
- **Career Resources:** Listings for job opportunities and career development tools.
- **Volunteer Opportunities:** Information on ways to give back to the community through dental outreach programs.

### 2. Mentorship and Networking

The ODA facilitates a mentorship program to connect dental students and new dentists with seasoned professionals. These relationships can provide guidance, support, and insight into navigating the nuances of practicing dentistry in Oregon.

### 3. Continuing Education

The ODA organizes events and conferences that offer continuing education credits, allowing new dentists to stay current with the latest advancements in dental care and practice management.

### 4. Advocacy and Representation

The ODA represents the interests of Oregon dentists in legislative matters, ensuring that the voices of dental professionals are heard in policymaking processes. Membership provides a platform to engage in advocacy efforts that impact the dental profession at the state level.

### 5. Leadership

Let the Oregon Dental Association guide you on your journey in continued excellence and leadership growth by participating in the annual Leadership Academy. This program provides you with a unique backstage pass to ODA offerings and experiences, while developing and enhancing your leadership and interpersonal skills. Customized to each participant, depending upon area(s) of interest, the Academy guarantees a deeper understanding and growth where it matters most to you!

### Getting Started: Maximizing Your Membership

To fully leverage the resources available through organized dentistry, consider the following steps:

1. **Activate Your Membership:** Ensure your membership with the ADA and ODA is active and up to date.
2. **Explore Available Resources:** Familiarize yourself with the various programs and benefits offered by both organizations.
3. **Engage with the Community:** Participate in events and networking opportunities to connect with peers and mentors.
4. **Utilize Member Discounts:** Take advantage of the savings offered through the ADA Member Advantage program to reduce practice and personal expenses.
5. **Prioritize Wellness:** Incorporate the wellness resources provided to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

The early years of a dental career are pivotal in shaping long-term success and satisfaction. By engaging with organized dentistry through the ADA and ODA, new dentists can access a wealth of resources designed to support professional development, enhance practice management, and promote personal well-being. Embracing these opportunities can lead to a fulfilling and prosperous career in dentistry. ●

ODA STAFF



TEAL ROSE PHOTO

NOTE: This guide is written with steps specific for those intending to practice in Oregon. Some of the processes may vary in other states.

# New Oregon Dentist ROADMAP

FROM THE OREGON DENTAL ASSOCIATION

## SEPTEMBER (DS4)

**Update Resume or CV.** Don't forget to include all extracurricular activities, research, leadership positions, CE or conference experiences, and volunteering done in dental school.

**CV & RESUME ASSISTANCE:**  
ASDANET.org/index/dental-student-resources/writing-your-cv

**Explore CE Opportunities** you can pursue during DS4 year. Take the free CE while it lasts! Once you're a licensed dentist, approximately 40 hours of CE are required to renew your license every two years.

**ADA CE:** ADA.org/education/continuing-education  
**ODA CE:** OregonDental.org

### Write Out Career and Personal Goals.

Talk with family, friends, and mentors to identify the kind of practice you want to join.

If you are interested in working for a **DSO**, start researching DSOs in the area and talk to alumni about their experiences working for these organizations.

If you are interested in working in **private practice**, reach out to mentors in the community and look at local job postings to identify which practices may be looking for new associates.

If you are interested in working for **public health**, reach out to organizations to see if they are hiring new dentists.

**ODA MENTOR PROGRAM:**  
OregonDental.org/member-center/mentor-program

### Budget for licensing exam and boards.

As of 2024, approximate costs of exams are as follows:

- ✓ **National Boards Exam: \$900**
- ✓ **ADEX: \$3,000**
- ✓ **DLOSCE: \$1,000**

01

A month-by-month timeline for your last year of dental school

## 02 OCTOBER (DS4)

**Determine which licensing exam you will be taking.**

**Register for licensing exam and national boards.** Be aware that **DLOSCE** is offered in testing windows and the **ADEX exam** is offered at certain locations on pre-scheduled dates only. *See links below for more information.*

When you sign up, select for the results to be sent to any state you may end up practicing in. Often, selecting additional states after signing up or taking the exam comes with additional fees.

**Study for the written portion of regional boards or DLOSCE**, using resources on the corresponding websites for the exams.

### ASDA LICENSURE RESOURCES

Learn which states require which licensing exams, for example:  
ASDANET.org/index/dental-student-resources/dental-licensure

**DLOSCE SIGN-UP:** JCNDE.ADA.org/dlosce/dlosce-apply

**ADEX SIGN-UP:** ADEXtesting.org

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Page 1 of 4



**Tools & Resources from ADA**  
Podcast • Wellness • Licensure • & More  
[ADA.org/resources/students](https://www.ada.org/resources/students)

# New Dentist ROADMAP

## NOVEMBER (DS4)

03

**Keep studying for boards and licensing exams.**

**Identify good references for future job applications: Faculty, External Rotation Preceptors, Group Leaders, etc.** Ask if any would be willing to write a letter of recommendation or provide verbal references for future employers.

**Start searching for jobs.** Some of your classmates may start signing contracts with bigger organizations like DSOs or public health clinics; others may be applying for residencies. What direction will you go in?

## JANUARY (DS4)

05

**Start applying for open job postings.** Submit your resume/CV with requests for more information to start getting your name out there.



- ODA DENTAL CAREER CONNECT:** [OregonDental.org/member-center/oda-connect](https://OregonDental.org/member-center/oda-connect)
- AMERICAN DENTAL ASSN. PRACTICE TRANSITIONS (ADAPT):** [ADApracticeTransitions.com](https://ADApracticeTransitions.com)

**Brainstorm how to save for upcoming expenses: licensing and other expenses.**

Below are some of the costs as of 2024. Note that costs are subject to change:

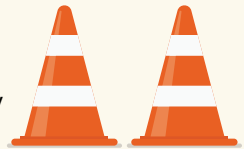
- ✔ **Licensing Fees:** \$445 application fee, \$50 PDMP fee, \$440 biannual licensure fee, \$40 nitrous oxide sedation permit fee
- ✔ **Adjunct Costs of Licensing Process:** \$30 for fingerprinting
- ✔ **Cost of DEA License:** \$888 for a 3-year license. (This is not always needed, but often required for insurance credentialing.)
- ✔ **Lawyer fees to review future contracts:** Cost varies. Reach out to trusted references for quotes.
- ✔ **After-graduation living expenses** (without financial aid). Costs vary; determine if you'll need to take out additional loans, apply for summer jobs, and/or ask for family support.



## DECEMBER (DS4)

**Take boards and/or licensing exams** (specifically DLOSCE and written portion of regional exams). You can take these earlier or later, but if you're are prepared, **sooner is always better**, just

in case you have to re-take any portion and do not want to delay graduation or licensure.



## FEBRUARY (DS4)

**Start collecting notes and documentation of dental cases for job interviews: Portfolios, Photos (de-identified), and Documented Experiences.**

**Make use of your student discount.**

If you want new loupes at the student discount, reach out to local reps and budget for a new pair.



## MARCH (DS4)



### Review licensing application on Oregon Board of Dentistry (OBD) website.

Be mindful of which application you are viewing. If you are a new grad who has

never had a dentist license, use the “Dental – Licensure by Examination Application.” If you are interested in obtaining a nitrous oxide sedation permit, review that application as well.

**NOTE** This separate application has a few pages of “worksheet-style” questions that require time to complete.



### OREGON DENTAL LICENSURE BY EXAMINATION APPLICATION:

[Oregon.gov/dentistry/Pages/apply-license.aspx](https://Oregon.gov/dentistry/Pages/apply-license.aspx)

### Start collecting additional documentation you may need to submit with your licensing application:

- ✔ **Photo** (selfie or passport photo are acceptable)
- ✔ **License verifications from other states if you have ever held any medical license** (yes, expired dental assisting or medical assistant licenses, too!). Many states require a fee and their own form to have verification of your license sent to the OBD. This can take weeks to get verification to the OBD. Be prepared!
- ✔ **Any documentation from past citations** or other legal issues you need to report on your application for licensure.

# New Dentist ROADMAP

## 08 APRIL (DS4)

**Make sure BLS is updated.** This will be required for your license, as well as many jobs and credentialing applications.

**Start interviewing for jobs.** Practice interviewing with classmates, mentors, and group leaders. Come up with your own questions to bring to the interviews. ODA Mentor Groups can help you with interviewing tips and tricks.

### Participate in ADA National Signing Day.

**Join the ODA** Level up your student membership to receive complimentary membership for the first 18 months after graduation and take advantage of ALL the tripartite benefits and resources.

**Attend Oregon Dental Conference (it's free for students!) and start networking.**



**OREGON DENTAL CONFERENCE:**  
[OregonDentalConference.org](https://OregonDentalConference.org)



## 09 MAY (DS4)

### Update resume with final class rank, awards, etc.

### Submit all parts of licensing application that you can.

For boards and licensing, screenshots of scores (showing your name and date of exam) are usually all that is required. With this screenshot, OBD can look up your verified scores that you had selected to send to them during sign-up. Review the application many times before submitting; get family and/or friends to review for errors, as well. Order final transcript to be sent to OBD when released.

### Have trusted lawyer review job contracts.

**Sign for new job! Ask what your future employer will cover.** (Relocation assistance? Licensing like DEA? Work while waiting for licensure? Pay association dues?)

**If you are taking the ADEX exam, it is usually offered at OHSU in May.**

# New Dentist ROADMAP

*Congratulations*

## JULY

11

**Take jurisprudence exam** (part of licensing process) **when sent to you.** Do this quickly to avoid any delays in licensure.

**Review the status of your license application.** It can take at least six to eight weeks to receive your license. The OBD has a form to check on its status:



**OREGON BOARD OF DENTISTRY:**

[Oregon.gov/dentistry/Pages/status.aspx](https://Oregon.gov/dentistry/Pages/status.aspx)

## SEPTEMBER (AND BEYOND)

13

**Start working!**

**Keep in contact with classmates and mentors.**

**Use organized dentistry to stay in contact with mentors and colleagues. Get involved with our amazing profession!**



**OREGON DENTAL ASSOCIATION:**

[OregonDental.org](https://OregonDental.org)

**AMERICAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION:**

[ADA.org](https://ADA.org)

*You made it!*

10

## JUNE

**Enjoy graduation!** Enjoy family and dental school friends. Don't forget to frame that diploma!

**Submit licensing application if you haven't already.**

**Final transcripts with posted degrees will likely be released by OHSU in late June.**

12

## AUGUST

**Check on your license status.** Check your email for updates or review your license status on the OBD website under "License Verification."

**Communicate with employer about getting credentialed with insurance companies.**

Many will require an NPI and DEA number.

You'll need an NPI number before

you can apply for a DEA number.

**NPI NUMBER APPLICATION**

[NPPES.cms.hhs.gov](https://NPPES.cms.hhs.gov)

**DEA APPLICATION**

[DEAdiversion.ugsdog.gov/drugreg](https://DEAdiversion.ugsdog.gov/drugreg)

# Join the ODA's Legislative Action Team!

In these uncertain times, organized dentistry has never been more important. The ODA is building its team of dental advocates and looking for members interested in getting involved in the legislative process!

The ODA has assembled an experienced, professional lobby team that represents the interests and needs of the dental industry in Salem and Washington D.C., but there is no substitute for the voices of those working with patients and running dental offices every day and who can advocate for patients' rights. Legislators want to hear from those with firsthand experience in dentistry, which is why we need YOU to sign up and get involved with our Legislative Action Team!

## What does it mean to join the ODA Legislative Action Team?

Signing up does not mean we're going to ask you to give up your day job and spend every day lobbying for dentistry in Salem. It simply means you'll be added to our list of advocates that we can call upon when we need dentists to speak on behalf of the industry.

## What might I be asked to do as a member of the ODA Legislative Action Team?

Advocacy can take many forms, depending on your comfort level, experience and expertise. As a member of the ODA Legislative Action Team, you may be invited to:

- Write a letter to your legislators
- Call your legislator's office to urge them to vote on a bill
- Write an op-ed for a local publication
- Attend a meeting with a legislator
- Attend Dental Day at the Capitol in Salem
- Testify in a legislative committee
- Attend a fundraiser on behalf of ODA's political action committee: DOPAC
- Fly to Washington, D.C. with dental advocates from across the country to advocate for dental priorities with your members of Congress

## How do I sign up?

Go to [oregondental.org/government-affairs/advocacy/legislative-action-team](http://oregondental.org/government-affairs/advocacy/legislative-action-team) and let us know which activities you are interested in. You can also email ODA's Director of Government and Regulatory Affairs Brett Hamilton at [bhamilton@oregondental.org](mailto:bhamilton@oregondental.org) and express your interest directly.



# Elimination of Grad PLUS Loans and PSLF Restrictions Threatens Dental Education and the Future Oral Health Workforce



FEATURE

By Brett Hamilton, Director of Government and Regulatory Affairs

At the time of writing, HB 1 (One Big Beautiful Bill) was still under consideration. It was passed on July 3rd. The passed version does eliminate Grad PLUS loans, ICR, PAYE, and SAVE and creates a new IDR plan, the details of which are still unknown. The passed version does make some changes to PSLF, but residency years will still continue to count toward eligibility.

**FEDERAL STUDENT LOAN REFORM CONTINUES TO BE** an ongoing conversation, particularly given student loan reform is a central component of the proposed One Big Beautiful Bill (OB BB).

Three proposed changes included in the bill have sparked significant concern across the dental education and public health communities: the elimination of the Graduate PLUS (Grad PLUS) loan program, the imposition of stricter limits on the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, and the repeal of key income-driven repayment (IDR) plans, including Income-Contingent Repayment (ICR), Pay As You Earn (PAYE), and the Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) plan.

While intended as cost-saving measures for the federal government, these reforms could have serious unintended consequences, particularly for dental education and the future of oral health care in the United States.

The American Dental Association (ADA) has consistently supported programs to bolster student aid and reduce academic disparities, including the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, National Health Service Corps' programs (scholarship, Students to Service, and loan repayment), Faculty Loan Repayment program, and Indian Health Service Loan Repayment program, and is extremely concerned about the long-term impacts these proposed changes could have.

Although the ADA did support one element in the OB BB – the Student

Success and Taxpayer Savings Plan, which stipulates zero interest accrual on deferred federal loans for medical and dental residents for up to four years – the other proposed changes in the bill are troublesome. Most concerning, the proposal to eliminate Grad PLUS loans and restrict Parent PLUS loans is expected to put dental school out of reach for thousands of students and could pose serious risk to the dental workforce, according to the ADA.

The ADA and ODA have been carefully following these developments and have expressed concerns about cuts to student aid programs. In addition, the ADA congressional and federal affairs teams have led efforts to raise awareness of this issue. They have coordinated two coalition letters, with support from 31 national health organizations, and are launching a grassroots campaign to mobilize dentists to advocate for reasonable student loan reform.

## The Role of Grad PLUS Loans in Dental Education

It is no secret that dental school is one of the most expensive professional education pathways in the U.S., with average educational debt for new dental school graduates exceeding \$300,000. Federal Grad PLUS loans have long served as a crucial financing mechanism for dental students who have exhausted their federal Direct Stafford Loan limits. These loans offer a lifeline that allows students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to pursue careers in dentistry.

Seventy-six percent of dental students utilize Grad PLUS loans either as a stand-alone financing mechanism or in addition to Direct Stafford Loans, according to the ADA. Eliminating the Grad PLUS program would severely limit access to dental education for many students, particularly those from underrepresented and lower-income backgrounds. Private loans, the likely alternative, often come with higher interest rates, fewer protections, and less favorable repayment terms. If aspiring dentists cannot afford their education, dental schools may face declining enrollment and a shrinking applicant pool, undermining the profession's ability to meet future demand.

## How Public Service Loan Forgiveness Supports the Oral Health Safety Net

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program encourages dental professionals to work in underserved communities by offering debt forgiveness after 10 years of qualifying public service employment and income-driven repayments. ADA leaders also expressed concern over a provision in the OB BB that would exclude dental and medical students with commercial loans from participating in the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

Dentists in community health centers, federally qualified health centers, public hospitals, and academic institutions often rely on PSLF to make their career choice financially viable. "Placing restrictions on [the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program] for dentists could hamper public health efforts, reduce

military readiness, and harm the domestic workforce,” said the ADA.

Proposals to restrict or cap PSLF benefits, such as limiting the total amount forgiven or tightening eligibility, would make it harder to attract and retain dentists in public service roles. These roles are essential to improving access to care in rural and low-income communities, where oral health disparities are most pronounced. Without PSLF, many dental professionals may choose more lucrative private practice options over community-focused care, further deepening the access gap.

Finally, the ADA objected to a measure that aims to “create skin-in-the-game” accountability for colleges by requiring institutions to reimburse the secretary for a percentage of the nonrepayment balance associated with certain loans. This could have unintended consequences for dental schools, according to the ADA, and this risk-sharing process poses unnecessary challenges for institutions and students.

While it is essential to ensure the sustainability and accountability of federal student loan programs, reforms must be designed with a nuanced understanding of how graduate and professional education, particularly in high-need fields like dentistry,

functions. Preserving access to affordable, equitable student financing tools like Grad PLUS and PSLF is not just a matter of student aid policy; it is a public health imperative.

The ADA said of the proposed federal changes: “We appreciate the committee’s goal to make higher education more affordable, but we believe that the cuts presented will ultimately prove detrimental to American students. We would support any effort to find compromise to protect these crucial programs, and we are always ready to offer the ADA’s input and collaboration. We respectfully ask that you keep these thoughts in mind as the reconciliation process continues.”

### Implications for the Oral Health Workforce and Public Health

Together, the loss of Grad PLUS loans and limitations on PSLF threaten to destabilize the dental education model that the U.S. relies on to train its oral health workforce. If fewer students can afford to attend dental school, and fewer graduates are incentivized to serve in public health settings, the ripple effects will be far-reaching, including:

- **Widening workforce shortages** in areas already struggling to recruit and retain dental professionals.

- **Worsening oral health inequities**, particularly in medically underserved areas.
- **Decreased diversity** in the dental profession, as financial barriers disproportionately affect students of color and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Strained academic institutions**, especially dental schools that rely on a pipeline of federally funded students and alumni engaged in public service.

ODA’s advocacy team will be monitoring this legislation closely and will provide regular updates. However, this is also a good time to review your current repayment plan and certify your PSLF Employment Certification Form annually. If you have older FFEL or Perkins Loans, you may want consultation about consolidating them into a Direct Consolidation Loan. As an ADA member you can receive free 30-minute consultation with one of one of Laurel Road’s student loan specialists at <https://www.laurelroad.com/partnerships/ada/> to get the facts and develop your personalized plan. You also may want to seek consultation about consolidation. Finally, we highly encourage everyone with student loans to frequently check updates from reliable sources such as [studentaid.gov](https://studentaid.gov) to inform your decisions. 📢

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Apply today at [willamette.careers/oda](https://willamette.careers/oda) for positions in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.



# SAVE THE DATE FOR THE 2025

ODA House of Delegates!



The 2025 ODA House of Delegates will take place virtually on October 11th, 2025. All ODA members are welcomed and encouraged to attend- mark your calendars and plan to serve as a delegate for your local component society. We look forward to “seeing” you there!

To register for the  
**2025 ODA House of Delegates,**  
visit <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/dAyRufuZSG-CDJzYaAp8JQ>

# Diverse Range of Dental Experiences Allows Dr. Plunkett Unique Perspective on Dental Profession, Integration



Dr. Michael Plunkett

## MEMBER PROFILE

By Jennifer Sitton

### WHILE TODAY'S DENTAL SCHOOL GRADUATES OFTEN

**DIVERGE** from the once traditional path of private practice ownership, Dr. Michael Plunkett began forging his own winding, nontraditional path through dentistry back in 2004, when he graduated from dental school and began his career in a community health clinic in Kansas City. He soon realized that his passion was not necessarily limited to the oral surgery specialty that drew him into dentistry and decided to explore the health policy and administrative side of health care.

"When I was coming through my training, I realized the options for me were to become an oral surgeon or another clinical dental focus," said Dr. Plunkett. "At some point, I was exposed to health care administration and policy, and I realized I was very interested in how dentistry fit into the broader health care system."

Dr. Plunkett worked full time on Kansas City's eastside at an integrated medical and dental public health clinic that served the Latino community while completing his master's degree in public health with a focus in health policy and administration. In 2007, he moved to Portland and took a full-time position at OHSU, where he taught classes in dental public health and healthcare policy and was responsible for developing the community-based education program where students participate in clinical rotations at community health clinics and small private practices with a focus on serving Medicaid populations.

"At the time, there was a big movement nationally for dental students to get more experience

in diverse practice environments to broaden their clinical scope and career perspectives," said Dr. Plunkett. "The concept was blossoming at the time, and it has really taken off since then at OHSU and most other dental schools."

During his time at OHSU, Dr. Plunkett stayed active seeing patients at the Multnomah County Health Clinic and at Willamette Dental.

In 2010, after the passage of the Affordable Care Act at the federal level, Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber embraced and championed health care reform in Oregon. Integration of care, including behavioral and dental health into the overall system, was a major part of Kitzhaber's vision. Dr. Plunkett was recruited by Care Oregon, Oregon's largest Medicaid health plan, to build a dental program. As the Dental Director for Care Oregon, Dr. Plunkett helped launch the integration of dental benefits, built partnerships, and built the dental program from the ground up.

"The Affordable Care Act was a very big change to the health care system, and the governor was doing a lot at the time to integrate services," said Dr. Plunkett. "Companies were taking notice and looking at how they had to integrate different health care functionalities to be a good partner at the state and national level."

At the same time, from 2010-2014, Dr. Plunkett served as the founding dental director for Neighborhood Health Center, which was supported by Care Oregon and is now a federally qualified health center.

In 2014, Dr. Plunkett joined Kaiser Permanente Dental and has served in a number of roles varying from business

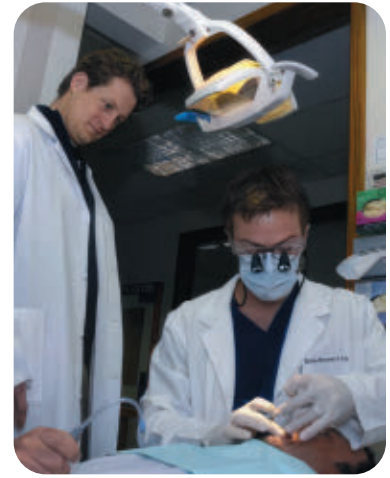
development and operations to his current role as vice president-business strategy and administration for Permanente Dental Associates.

"Moving into a system that's predominantly commercial and serving large employers with only a small Medicaid population is a very different experience because the business and operations side involves more complex administrative functions and there's a much broader constituency that you're serving," said Dr. Plunkett of his transition to Kaiser. "I was moving from a purely community health and Medicaid focus to a large, integrated commercial system."

Kaiser's commitment to integration throughout its medical system made Dr. Plunkett a perfect fit to contribute to its growth in business and patient services, given his experience leading a community health center system and a statewide integrated dental program at Care Oregon.

"We (Kaiser Permanente) are without a doubt the most integrated medical-dental system in the country," said Dr. Plunkett. "We are effectively a large integrated department in a multi-specialty health care system. While we function as a comprehensive dental system, we're integrated in the same way as other large medical services."

Dr. Plunkett still teaches classes at OHSU in the areas of public health and policy, as well as finance and practice operations, where he focuses on models of practice, acquisitions, selling, and everything from large corporations to private practices. His unique and broad experience has allowed him to see dentistry from



DR. MICHAEL PLUNKETT

nearly every perspective of the industry, offering unique insights into the future of dentistry and how that future will be forced to adapt to outside influences.

“My past and current experiences have shown me that overall economic forces in the system we live in, including the economy, what large employers are going through, what’s happening at the federal and state level, budget issues, etc., all have an impact on dentistry – and sometimes a very direct impact,” said Dr. Plunkett. “If you don’t at least understand some of the macroeconomic forces and overall environment that you’re functioning in, you’re not going to have the tools to deal with the challenges you’re facing in your specific practice.”

Dr. Plunkett seeks to instill this broader perspective and insight in his students at OHSU’s School of Dentistry, ensuring that they understand the impacts that the world around them is having on their industry and their own lives.

“You don’t have to be a health policy expert, but you do have to understand, for example, that if a company like Intel is likely to leave its geographic area or if the state is planning to change its offering to all public employees, it’s going to have downstream impacts on resources for the industry and that will affect the kind of players in the industry who can sustain bad times and good times,” said Dr. Plunkett.

At the same time, he also recognizes that the challenges facing young

graduates are greater than ever before, particularly the economic forces.

“The barriers to entry (to private practice) are higher than ever before,” said Dr. Plunkett, recognizing that the cost of living has increased dramatically in major cities throughout the United States, while at the same time “a significant number of practices are now owned under corporate dental service organizations” leading to a smaller number of private practices for sale that are often prohibitively expensive for young dentists who once may have considered that route into dentistry.

Dr. Plunkett believes it is important that dentists – particularly recent graduates – understand the systems around them that could impact their futures and urges his students and colleagues to seek a seat at the table to help develop solutions that put the profession in a good strategic position to succeed.

One way to ensure dentistry has a seat at that table where decisions are being made that impact the industry is through involvement with the Oregon Dental Association (ODA).

“I think it’s really important for any profession to have a collective voice because that’s the way the system works – if you don’t have a collective voice, you don’t have a voice,” said Dr. Plunkett. “That’s what political leaders are looking for: constituencies, not individuals.”

Dr. Plunkett has been involved with the ODA since he moved to Oregon in

2007 and believes that the organization provides a key avenue for dentists in the state to impact the legislative process and the prioritization of the profession in policy discussions.

“When we come together – even when we have differences internally about how the practice of dentistry should move forward – and demonstrate that we are working together, that projects a positive message externally,” said Dr. Plunkett. “It’s important to show that when it comes to caring for the public and having a dental system that works for all members of society, dentists come together.”

From working in public health to teaching the next generation of dental students to serving as the dental director for Care Oregon and now supporting Kaiser’s dental system, Dr. Plunkett’s broad range of experience allows him to provide a unique perspective on every facet of dentistry – and where we go from here.

“Not everyone can treat every person or every population, so we really need to have some way of bringing all our colleagues to the table to assure decisionmakers that we have everyone’s best interests in mind,” said Dr. Plunkett. “If I were meeting with the governor, and I had one minute to talk about dentistry, I would want her to know that no matter the challenge, dentists have the best interest of the public in mind.” ●

# Tooth Taxi Update

By Carrie Peterson, Tooth Taxi Program Manager

**THE TOOTH TAXI RECENTLY MADE MEANINGFUL VISITS** to two new schools – **Green Elementary in Roseburg** and **Gilbert Park Elementary in Portland** – bringing much-needed dental care to students who might otherwise go without.

## Green Elementary, Roseburg

Prior to our visit to Green Elementary, I traveled to Roseburg to meet with the school's principal and office manager, Cherie. Since this was our first time working together, I provided an overview of the Tooth Taxi program, reviewed all necessary paperwork, and explained the logistics of our visit. After we'd gone over everything, I asked if they had any questions. Cherie looked at me and asked, "You'll see anybody at the school who signs up?" When I said yes, she began to cry. "We have so many kids that I know need this service, and we are just so grateful." Students here are lucky to have a champion like Cherie advocating for them.

The week turned out to be both busy and rewarding. In addition to restorative care, we were able to offer extra cleanings and one-on-one oral hygiene instruction. Many of our patients came onboard with siblings or friends, and the support and

encouragement they gave each other made a noticeable difference in their comfort and confidence. (What's better than having a dental appointment with your bestie?) We also participated in the school's lockdown drill and used the opportunity to review and refine our own safety protocols.

By the end of the week, we had completed **46 appointments** and provided over **\$23,000 worth of care**.

## Gilbert Park Elementary, Portland

Our next stop was Gilbert Park Elementary. After screening the students, we discovered that **25% had emergent dental needs**, with many experiencing severe decay, broken teeth, and infections.

On our third day, as I arrived to pick up our next patient, a second-grade teacher pulled me aside. One of her students had a toothache – could we see her? Thanks to the quick action of school staff, her parent was contacted and came in to complete the paperwork. Within an hour, the student was onboard the Tooth Taxi.

Upon examination, we found she had an infected molar and the adjacent tooth was decayed beyond repair. Dr. Davis numbed the area and



TOOTH TAXI STAFF

took care of both teeth. The student was incredibly brave, and by the end of her visit, she was smiling and ready to return to class – pain-free and able to focus again.

During our time at Gilbert Park, we significantly improved students' oral health by providing **53 fillings**, **24 cleanings**, and **26 extractions**.

Each community we visit is different and presents its own unique challenges – but every visit reminds us why this work matters. The impact we're making goes far beyond teeth. It's about comfort, confidence, and ensuring that kids can return to the classroom ready to thrive. ●



The Dental Foundation of Oregon (DFO), the charitable arm of the Oregon Dental Association, is thrilled to announce Sydney Clevenger as our new director of development!

Sydney brings a wealth of experience in communications and non-profit development and will be collaborating closely with the DFO Board and the Tooth Taxi team to boost engagement and expand support for our vital programs.

She is no stranger to Oregon's dental community, having served for nine years as the communications director at the OHSU School of Dentistry. Most recently, Sydney held development roles at Cedar Sinai Park and Lewis & Clark College.

We're excited to welcome Sydney to the team and look forward to the energy and expertise she brings to our mission.

# Supporting Wellness in Early Dental Careers

## WELLNESS

By Heather Langdon, ODA Membership Coordinator and Wellness Liaison

### STARTING A CAREER IN DENTISTRY IS BOTH

exciting and demanding. For new dentists – those within the first 10 years of practice – the transition from dental school into the professional world often comes with steep challenges. Managing significant student debt, adjusting to clinical and administrative responsibilities, and maintaining work-life balance can create considerable stress. To support new dentists through these formative years, the Oregon Dental Association (ODA) and the American Dental Association (ADA) offer a range of wellness tools designed to promote long-term health and professional fulfillment.

Mental and emotional wellness is a key priority. Both organizations recognize that burnout, anxiety, and isolation are real risks for early-career professionals. That's why ADA members now have free access to **Talkspace Go**, a digital mental health

support app that provides self-guided therapy tools. For those seeking more structured support, **Talkspace Therapy** connects users with licensed therapists through secure text, video, and audio messaging – offering accessible, confidential care on your schedule and at a significantly reduced cost.

Locally, the **Oregon Wellness Program** provides three free confidential, stigma-free mental health services to all Oregon dentists. It offers direct access to experienced, culturally competent therapists who understand the unique challenges of the profession. The program focuses on early intervention, emotional support, and fostering personal well-being – ensuring that no dentist has to face stress, burnout, or crisis alone.

Additionally, the **ODA Peer-to-Peer Wellness Ambassador Program** connects new dentists with trained volunteer Wellness Ambassadors who provide support, encouragement, and

a listening ear from within the dental community. These relationships can be invaluable, offering a sense of camaraderie and helping early-career dentists feel seen, heard, and supported.

The ADA also encourages regular use of the **Well-Being Index**, a confidential, clinically validated self-assessment tool created by the Mayo Clinic to help health professionals track their mental and emotional health over time.

Wellness is more than the absence of illness – it's about building a career that is sustainable, fulfilling, and resilient. Through these targeted programs and partnerships, the ODA and ADA are deeply committed to helping new dentists not only succeed clinically but thrive personally and professionally.

For more information, visit [oregondental.org/wellness](https://oregondental.org/wellness). Your well-being is essential – now and throughout your career. 🌱

Save the date for an evening of yoga and wellness  
December 11, 2025, at 7 p.m.  
In person at the ODA building or virtual.



# Dr. Eddie Ramirez Recognized as a 2025 ADA 10 Under 10 Award Winner



Dr. Eddie Ramirez

**EDDIE RAMIREZ, DMD, WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD** and visiting family in his native Mexico when he became smitten with the idea of becoming a dentist. “My aunt had just graduated from dental school and she let me be her assistant and clean the spit bowl. I fell in love,” he said.

Dr. Ramirez, who was a year old when his parents moved to the United States and who grew up in the Gresham/Fairview area, was among the first generation of undocumented students who have lived and worked here under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy. Through multiple challenges and obstacles, he completed his undergraduate studies at Portland State University.



“I remember that during the orientation my mom said we couldn’t afford it, and because of my undocumented status I was only able to get \$3,500 in scholarships,” he said, noting some of his high school teachers offered to pay for his first year of college.

He faced the same financial uncertainty as he applied to dental schools. Of the five Dr. Ramirez applied to, three rejected him without even looking at his application. The Oregon Health & Science University School of Dentistry was the only one to grant him an interview.

As an undocumented student, he was not eligible to apply for federal loans, so he applied for a Scholars for a Healthy Oregon Initiative scholarship. The award allowed him to complete his education in 2018, making him the first undocumented individual to graduate from OHSU’s dental school. Dr. Ramirez now practices at Pioneer Dental Group in Oregon City.

“I really appreciate the connection I have with my patients and the process of earning their trust. I’m a big believer in really getting to know my patients and not just treating the tooth, but the whole patient,” he said.

In late March, the American Dental Association honored Dr. Ramirez as one of this year’s 10 Under 10 Award recipients. The ADA New Dentist Committee chose the recipients for demonstrating excellence and inspiring others in science, research and education; practice excellence; philanthropy; leadership; and advocacy. All 10 winners are ADA

members who graduated from dental school less than 10 years ago.

Dr. Ramirez described receiving the award as “surreal,” adding it is significant to not only be recognized on a national level but especially as someone who came from a very modest background and did not follow a traditional path into medicine.

“I didn’t do it alone. I had instructors and teachers who have supported me since high school who literally gave me money to support me. They deserve the recognition, too, because they are part of the reason I’m here,” he said. “It’s also another way to say thank you to my mom, who cooked meals for me while I studied, and to my dad for everything they did to support me.”

Organized dentistry is a top priority for Dr. Ramirez, who serves the ADA as a national leader on the Council of Dental Benefit Program and as a delegate to the ADA House of Delegates. He is also a state leader on the ODA Board of Trustees and is often invited to speak nationwide, inspiring communities through his story that obstacles can be turned into blessings.

“Organized dentistry is really important, especially coming from the newer generation. When you look at who is retiring and who the new generation of leadership will be, it’s people who may not want to practice corporate dentistry or be part of a big group,” he said. “I think it’s important to be the voice of the newer generation. Our lifestyles are different and our ways of seeing things are different.”

# Coastal Cascades Dentist Society – Goat Happy Hour

COMPONENT  
HIGHLIGHT

By Nissa Newton, Executive Director, Coastal Cascades Dentist Society

**COASTAL CASCADES DENTIST SOCIETY HELD A** “Goat Happy Hour” social at the Original Goat Yoga. Dentists and some of their staff met at the farm, brushed goats, and took a tour of the farm, which had sheep dogs, two pigs, chickens, and a cat. The setting was in rural Monroe with exquisite mountain views. The group enjoyed wine, cheese, and fruit in the rustic barn filled with goat decor that someday the owner, Lainey, hopes to make into a “goatel” bread and breakfast. When the evening came to close, there was a sense of rejuvenation after spending time at the farm and meeting our new goat friends. 🐐



NISSA NEWTON

# 2025 OHSU School of Dentistry Graduates



**THE ODA WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE THE** 2025 OHSU School of Dentistry graduates on your significant accomplishment! We look forward to supporting you and being a part of your individual journeys.

Ayle Armstrong

Aziz Azar

Anna Ball

Arash Banisafar

Christian Beard

Robert Bergstrom

Stephanie Bobbitt

Stephen Brusse

Andy Bui

Anabela Cagen

Kylie Carganilla

Trae Carpenter

Adya Chaurasia

Sydney Chen

Jason Cho

Avery Douglass

Maria Duval

Jacob Erickson

Garrit Esplin

Hussein Fakih

Courtney Gering

Austin Gorton

Karly Gushiken

Taylor Hamby

Casper Huang

Jens Huseby

Carrie Hyatt

Samuel Johnson

Alan Jordan

Nawal Karam

Anna Kennedy

Anthony Kerr

Rania Khouri

Lilian Kim

Carissa King

Nathan Kingery

Kinai Kiyokawa

Parker Kuhn

Rebecca Lawrence

Isaac Lee

Sean Little

Marshall Magill

Bilal Manzer

Trevor Martin

Chase Mathieson

Tyler McCreddie

Abubeker Mohammednur

Michael Nelsen

Jihoon Noh

Jacob Olson

Clara Park

Joselene Piedra Rodriguez

Caleb Quinton

Thomas Rezendes

Ali Saad

Julianne Seog

Annelise Shaw

Dalton Shearer

Harprit Singh

Kimball Spencer

Dylan Steslicki

Jill Sukraw

Tiffany Tep

Valerie Thai

Michaelyn Truong

Trace VanCleave

Caleb Vantol

Adam Vasquez

Tina Vo

Linh Vuong

Alexandria Wong

Neng Yang

Mark Zakhariya

## OHSU Advanced Degree Graduates

### Endodontics

Dr. Mohammed Kadhem  
Dr. Seonyoung Min  
Dr. Ryan Reichelt

### General Practice Residency

Dr. Kevin Adams  
Dr. Kindel Bailey  
Dr. Ryleigh Delgado  
Dr. Rachel Hample  
Dr. Samuel McKinney  
Dr. Rosemary Pruneau

### Oral & Maxillofacial Surgery

Dr. Brando Delgado  
Dr. Bryan Rogers

### Pediatric Dentistry

Dr. Michelle Nguyen  
Dr. Mona Sivaneri  
Dr. Kailey Thomasen  
Dr. Angie Vartak

### Periodontics

Dr. Amanda Heydari  
Dr. Erest Holden  
Dr. Amy LaCoste

## VA Advanced Degree Graduates

### General Practice Residency

Dr. Fatima Kamara  
Dr. Ellen Krippaehne  
Dr. Roger Krupetsky  
Dr. Stephanie Ng



ODA STAFF



## ODA Student Leadership Award 2025

Congratulations to this year's Oregon Dental Association's Student Leadership Award recipient, Dr. Anna Marin Kennedy. Dr. Kennedy served as the ASDA Student Trustee to the ODA Board of Trustees for the 2023-2024 term. During her term as trustee, she provided the Board with invaluable insight and served as a liaison to OHSU and ASDA leadership. Thank you for all your hard work, and congratulations on the 2025 Student Leadership Award!

# OHSU Commencement Speech – Dr. Zeller

## GOOD AFTERNOON, COLLEAGUES.

I am honored and privileged to be here with you all today to celebrate the culmination of your hard work and commitment to the great profession of dentistry.

You have chosen an excellent career, and as a result many of your days will be excellent. Then of course some of those days may not always be so excellent. But on those hard days, you can rest assured that you are not alone. In fact, take a second right now to look around at the classmates to the left and right of you. When times get tough, remember that one thing will always remain. You will always have each other and the community of dentists around you. That is the beautiful thing about organized dentistry. No

matter how different we might all be, every single day we show up and we do the same job. Experiencing the highs and lows together makes our profession stronger.

While you should be very excited, I understand that some of you might be feeling that it's a weird time in the world right now. It's a weird time to go out there and start something new. From fake news to AI, increasingly it has become harder to understand what is real and what is not. So on those hard days, I think it's important to remember the following three REAL things, about the profession you have chosen. 1. Your job is to utilize the skills you have cultivated over the last four years to help other humans eat, to remove disease, to remove pain. You have learned how to improve

people's smiles, their confidence, and their mental health. One thing that is **real** is that you chose an incredibly meaningful career. You are making the world better. 2. Every single day you are going to meet new patients, that on the first day of meeting you, are expected to open their mouths and immediately trust you. I want you to take a second to recognize how wild that expectation really is. And yet, they do it. No matter how scared they are, they choose to take a leap and trust you. THAT is **real**. Do not forget what an absolute honor it is to accept that responsibility. 3. You have developed the skills to be a dentist. This decision has put you into a group of a lot of weird people, let's be real. But it has also given you the ability to become vaccinated against poverty. You will always have a skill that can get you a job. Not everyone can say that. That is **real**. And that should bring you a great deal of gratitude. So, like my AOL screen name in middle school said, keepitreal88.

Today, you are recognized as professionals. And coming from this great institution, you are well prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.

On behalf of the members and leaders of the Oregon Dental Association, the American Dental Association, and organized dentistry, we enthusiastically welcome you as colleagues. We implore you to get involved and *stay* involved as the voice of our profession and the patients and communities we serve each day. We are stronger together.

Thank you again for allowing me to share this wonderful day with you. Congratulations to you all. 🎓



ODA STAFF

# Tiffany Tep, DMD, Finds Her Calling as a Dentist for Kids

*Dental education and a life-changing service trip led her to pediatrics*

OHSU

By Rhonda Morin, APR

## TIFFANY TEP, DMD, FIRST CONSIDERED DENTISTRY EARLY

in her life, but it wasn't until she began working with children that she found her passion for the field.

Now, she's one of 73 DMD students in the OHSU School of Dentistry Class of 2025. She is part of the final class to start their dental education during the pandemic, when face masks and virtual learning were everyday life.

While in high school, the Beaverton local took part in the OHSU School of Dentistry's Dental Explorers year-long program (<https://www.ohsu.edu/school-of-dentistry/pathway-programs#section-1870071>). In college at Oregon State University, she joined a pre-dental club while studying biology with minors in chemistry and business. She also gained insight by shadowing at a dental clinic, where she observed patient care.

## Volunteering Brightens Outlook

When Tep began dental school in 2021, she found it challenging to adjust to the isolation of online learning. Pandemic protocols – face

masks, social distancing and virtual classes – made it harder to connect with classmates.

"I started failing things for the first time," she said.

To cope with the tough moments, Tep got involved in extracurricular groups to build a community of shared interests. Once in-person activities resumed, her cohort strengthened and she began to thrive by finding connection and renewed motivation.

"I like staying busy and engaging with my community," said Tep, who volunteers for Voices for Inclusion, Belonging and Equity, or VIBE, the American Student Dental Association, Bridges Collaborative Care Clinic, the School of Dentistry student government, and a Pediatric Interest Group.

Tep is a child of two Khmer Rouge genocide survivors. In December 2024, a service-learning trip to Cambodia solidified Tep's decision to specialize in pediatric dentistry. She traveled to Phnom Penh with two School of Dentistry peers and trip leader Michael Lacey, DMD, MAGD, a now-retired assistant

Reprinted with permission from OHSU Now. <https://now.ohsu.edu/member/post/de0fc7a8-13c3-4dde-afbf-cbfbad2e8bd2?uc=9752&g=afbf47e8-6797-493e-b0a5-afb9b1120cee&f=7182> All tools were used to review this story.

professor from the School of Dentistry Restorative Dentistry department. The experience also linked the group with dental students from the University of Health Sciences in Cambodia (<https://www.uhs.edu.kh/>).

The makeshift clinic, set up at a primary school and ministry, aimed to educate children about the health benefits of oral hygiene. Tep taught children how brushing and flossing prevent disease, remove plaque and reduce gum inflammation.

She also applied fluoride treatments, explaining the process by likening the process to painting fingernails with nail polish, a comparison that helped her patients of all ages feel more at ease.

"The experience was eye-opening for me," she said. "It reinforced why I want to go into pediatrics."

Tep hopes to ease dental anxiety by offering compassionate care to patients when they're young. She recognizes that children and adults face challenges, from embarrassment about their dental health and past negative experiences to financial obstacles and mistrust of dentists.

"We're here to help and support our patients, not to judge people," she said.

## Residency at OHSU

Tep isn't going far after graduating on June 6. Ten days later she has an

TIFFANY TEP



Brianne Nem, DMD '24, John Rutledge, a third-year dental student, and Tiffany Tep, a fourth-year dental student, prepare for a clinic day in Phnom Penh, Cambodia during a 2024 trip.



John Rutledge, Brianne Nem, DMD, instructor Michael Lacey, DMD, MAGD, and Tiffany Tep, outside in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, during a dental service-learning trip.

orientation for her OHSU Advanced Education Program in Pediatric Dentistry residency program, which starts July 1 (<https://www.ohsu.edu/school-of-dentistry/pediatric-dentistry-ohsu>).

“After my first rotation in the pediatric clinic, I couldn’t imagine myself doing anything else. I left every day feeling so happy, and I couldn’t wait to come back the next day,” Tep said, referring to her training during the DMD program.

Tep has come full circle. As a School of Dentistry student, she volunteered for the same Dental Explorers program that boosted her interest in high school. She also surrounds herself with mentors and peers who increase her confidence and model similar values.

“Before dental school, I used to be so afraid of failing. But I’ve learned from my mistakes. I’ve realized that I’m defined by how I’ve pushed through those failures.”

## DENTAL CLASSIFIEDS

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