

Floridians continue to call for increased access to dental care

Over 7 million in Florida live in dental deserts - the worst dental shortage in the nation

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA, USA, July 2, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The high cost of dental care, long waiting times for appointments, and inability to find dentists who take their insurance were common concerns voiced by Floridians who attended a recent Dental Access Listening Session at the AC Hotel Tallahassee by the Capitol. The event is part of a statewide dental access listening tour to [elevate the voices of Florida citizens](#) impacted by lack of access to dental care. The statewide listening tour is organized by Floridians for Dental Access and American Children's Campaign – two nonprofit leaders of a growing statewide movement of more than 400 organizations and individuals advocating for dental workforce reform.



More than 50 Floridians crowded into a dental access listening session to voice concerns about lack of access to oral health care. It is part of a statewide listening tour organized by Floridians for Dental Access and American Children's Campaign

Dangers of poor oral health

Good oral health is much more than white teeth and an attractive smile. It has far-reaching impacts on overall health. High blood pressure, adverse birth outcomes, dementia and diabetes are just some of the medical conditions that have a direct correlation to oral health.

More than 7.1 million Floridians lack access to basic dental care, and there are 260 areas across the state designated as Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas, according to data from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration. Florida would need to add at least 1,536 dentists just to remove current shortages.

Floridians' Oral Health Among the Worst in the Nation

The shortage is exacerbated by a statewide dentist-to-population ratio below the national average, with some counties having ratios as low as 1/10th of the national average. As a result,



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*Dr. Frank Catalanotto,
president of Floridians for
Dental Access*

many Floridians resort to expensive emergency care for preventable dental conditions, costing taxpayers millions.

Florida hospitals billed over a half-billion dollars (\$547,886,553) in 2021 for emergency room care and hospitalizations associated with non-traumatic dental conditions. Florida also leads the nation in the number of children utilizing the emergency room for dental pain, according to a report by CareQuest Institute for Oral Health.

Experts Call for Dental Workforce Reform in Florida

A diverse panel of health care experts presented their

views on Florida's oral health crisis at the listening session in Tallahassee. A common theme expressed by health care professionals is their frustration and helplessness in repeatedly seeing preventable dental conditions lead to unnecessary use of hospital emergency rooms and hospitalizations..

"Do the math. Florida's state funding Mission of Mercy dental clinics or loan forgiveness for dental students only touch a very small percentage of the true unmet oral health needs of Floridians," stated Dr. Frank Catalanotto, president of Floridians for Dental Access, and a panelist at the event.

Catalanotto also predicted the recent increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates will have a minimal impact on improving oral health access. "Less than one in five Florida dentists even accept Medicaid," he explained.

Recognizing that Florida's oral health crisis is a public health emergency requiring additional solutions, dental therapy legislation (HB 1173 and SB 1254) gained traction in Florida's 2024 legislative session, passing favorably through two House subcommittees.

Advocated by many public health organizations, and utilized worldwide for over 100 years, dental therapy is an evidence-based solution to increase access to dental care by licensing mid-level oral health practitioners to perform routine procedures under dentist supervision. Fourteen states nationwide have currently authorized the licensing of dental therapists with campaigns for dental therapy underway in Florida and several other states, according to the American Dental Therapy Association.

Share Your Story

Upcoming dental access listening sessions are being planned for the South Florida and Tampa

Bay regions later this year. However, Floridians who would like to voice their opinions about dental access in their community can share their thoughts any time by accessing [Floridians for Dental Access online forum](#). To view what other Floridians have to say about dental access, click [here](#).

As the state of Florida prepares for the upcoming legislative session in 2025, dental access advocates are hopeful that dental therapy legislation will be a focal point of discussion.

“Florida’s Live Healthy Act was a great step forward in improving Floridians’ access to healthcare, but much more progress is needed to ensure every Floridian has access to basic dental care,” stated Roy Miller, president of American Children’s Campaign. “More people every day are embracing dental therapy as a key part of the solution for Florida.

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