



**A Compendium of Veteran Oral Health Best, Promising, and Emerging Practice Approaches**

**RESOURCE GUIDE**  
May 2023



# **A Compendium of Veteran Oral Health Best, Promising, and Emerging Practice Approaches: Executive Summary**

## ***Purpose***

Veterans often struggle to access affordable, high-quality dental care. Only 15% of veterans are eligible for dental care through the Veterans Affairs health care system<sup>1</sup>. With the 2018 MISSION Act, Veterans Affairs (VA) expanded access to care for veterans through the Community Care Network (CCN). The CCN comprises six regional networks that serve as the contract vehicle for the VA to finance care for veterans from community providers like federally qualified health centers (FQHCs). As utilization of FQHCs steadily increases among veteran populations, these care centers can become leaders in integrated oral health care delivery that specializes in a community-based, person-centered approach. This compendium was developed by the American Institute of Dental Public Health (AIDPH) in collaboration with National Network for Oral Health Access (NNOHA) to identify frameworks for emerging, promising, and best practices in veteran oral health by highlighting innovative care delivery programs across the U.S.

## ***Approach***

AIDPH and NNOHA solicited information from veteran-centric oral health programs that provided clinical dental care to veterans. An expert panel reviewed, scored, and categorized each program submission as an emerging, promising, or best practice model within three categories: patient recruitment, clinical care delivery, and community engagement. The final 14 submissions are included in this compendium to be reviewed, replicated, and implemented for veteran oral health care.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Institute of Dental Public Health and CareQuest Institute for Oral Health. Improving the Oral Health of Rural Veterans Through Policy, Data Collection, and Care Delivery. Boston, MA: November 2022.

## ***Key Takeaways***

1. Established funding underscored most best practice models, a challenge in many programs given the ineligibility of most veterans to receive care through the VA.
2. Sustainable funding was linked to strong community partnerships as was effective patient recruitment and outcomes. Programs with partnerships outside of oral health were able to draw in more diverse recruitment and funding pools.
3. Many programs were scored as having an emerging or promising practice, mostly due to limited resources and the inability to scale to more comprehensive care or integrated delivery settings.
4. Overall, most participating programs were not federal qualified health centers, but did have frameworks or approaches that could easily be adapted, scaled, or improved in a community care setting.

FQHCs are designed to provide care in an integrated manner with a community-centered approach that supports social determinants of health. As a key access point for veterans experiencing barriers to care, this compendium is designed to identify models and frameworks for FQHCs to adapt in their clinical settings as they serve veterans.

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# INTRODUCTION

Millions of Americans, including veterans, struggle to access oral health services. While in the military, active duty service men and women have access to oral healthcare; however, upon separation from the military, this coverage ends. To receive dental care through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), veterans must apply for and be deemed eligible for care. However, due to strict eligibility criteria, only 15% (n=1,350,000) of the 9 million veterans enrolled in the VA for health care services qualify to receive dental care through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Of those eligible, only 34% (n=463,000) utilize VA dental care<sup>2</sup>.

In the [National Survey of Veterans](#), close to half of veterans (41%) described their oral health as “fair” or “poor,” and these veterans were more likely to report having a self-identified disability than veterans with better self-reported oral health. This unmet need serves as an opportunity to engage federally qualified health centers (FQHCs).

FQHCs are nonprofit health care facilities that serve low-income patients in medically underserved areas. Most FQHCs have dental facilities and all accept Medicaid and provide sliding fee discount scale payments based on income. FQHCs practice patient-centered care, which may enhance pathways for veterans to establish a dental home. Each year, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Health Center Program Uniform Data System (UDS) reports activities of health clinics that receive federal funding. In 2020, [376,634 veterans were seen in FQHCs](#), totaling 1.3% of the total patients seen, a steady increase from 2016, when 330,271 veteran patients were reported to have received care.<sup>3</sup> FQHCs are uniquely positioned to serve as access points for oral health care for veterans. FQHCs can become leaders in oral health care for this population with consensus on best pathways forward and publication of optimal oral health practices and interventions. It is important to remember that FQHCs are one component of the broader dental safety-net clinic community. Programs from a variety of safety-net clinics and safety-net clinic partners can help inform strategies utilized by FQHC dental clinics.<sup>4</sup>

Evidence-based healthcare practices, interventions, and procedures that improve patient health outcomes are deemed best practices. To advance healthcare systems, best practice methods should be scaled to the advantage of the population. Program scaling refers to implementing a successful process (best practice methods) on a larger scale, thereby serving more people with comparable benefits. By spreading knowledge of best practice methods, errors can be avoided, and valuable time can be saved.

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<sup>2</sup> The American Institute of Dental Public Health and CareQuest Institute for Oral Health. Improving the Oral Health of Rural Veterans Through Policy, Data Collection, and Care Delivery. Boston, MA: November 2022.

<sup>3</sup> “Health Center Program Uniform Data System (UDS) Data Overview,” Health Resources & Services Administration, accessed December 3, 2021, <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/data-reporting/program-data>.

<sup>4</sup> The American Institute of Dental Public Health and CareQuest Institute for Oral Health. Veteran Oral Health: Expanding Access and Equity. Boston, MA: December 2021. DOI: 10.35565/CQI.2021.2041

### ***How to Use this Document***

This document contains 14 programs of varying size, scope, and length of existence all aimed at improving the oral health of veterans in their communities. In our review of identified programs, AIDPH and NNOHA identified that there are few FQHCs with sustainable veteran oral health programs. This document contains strategies from other types of safety net organizations including non-profits, dental schools, and government health departments. It is important to recognize that communities have different environments, infrastructure, available resources, disease burdens, and political considerations that must be navigated to develop, implement, and maintain these programs. Information provided regarding each of these programs can help others identify partnerships, financial support, and strategies for collaboration to engage and provide care to veterans in their own communities. Stakeholders are encouraged to assess the information provided in this document and adapt the ideas and strategies by these 14 FQHC programs to better meet the unique needs of their own communities. There is no one-size-fits-all formula for programmatic success, however, these practices can provide insight for how other programs can be adapted and tailored to fit their own goals and community's needs.



# METHODOLOGY

## **Step One: Category and Definition Development**

First, AIDPH and NNOHA reviewed available literature and data on veteran oral health to understand the current clinical landscape and determine the knowledge gaps. Using FQHCs as the target audience, factors like scalability, clinical efficacy, and patient engagement were considered when developing a model for best practice submission and inclusion. The final framework defined three categories for best practice submissions:

1. *Patient recruitment, personalized communication and front office excellence*
2. *Clinical care delivery*
3. *Patient and community engagement.*

Accompanying these categories for submission recruitment were the definitions of a best, promising, and emerging practice. Final definitions were adapted from existing resources and finalized by workgroup leadership for the purposes of this document development.

1. A **best practice** is an intervention, program/service, strategy, or policy that has repeatedly demonstrated a positive impact on the desired objectives of the intervention, given the available evidence, and is deemed most suitable for a particular situation or context. A best practice is supported by evidence-based information (peer review, published guidelines based on peer review, etc.).
2. A **promising practice** is an intervention, program/service, strategy, or policy that shows potential (or 'promise') for developing into a best practice; there is a positive trend in success of the program as it is scaled yet. It has been implemented an increasing number of times in a variety of settings, but has not been rigorously nor consistently evaluated.
3. An **emerging practice** is a new intervention, program/service, strategy, or policy that addresses a critical need, but has not demonstrated long-term success, does not have broader scientific consensus, or is not scaled to wider adoption.

## **Step Two: Scale & Criteria Development**

Within the three guiding categories, four aims were created by AIDPH and NNOHA to collect and evaluate best practice submissions.

### **Aim #1 – Improve health outcomes for veterans**

- There is a history of veterans receiving oral health care and seeing an improvement in oral health.
- The practice provides opportunities for interprofessional collaboration and to improve the integration of health care.
- The practice is or can be measured and results are available to evaluate process or clinical outcomes.

### **Aim #2 – Improvements per capita cost of care**

- Improved timeliness of the delivery of definitive comprehensive dental care.
- Demonstrates operational and financial stability.
- The approach can produce cost savings.
- The practice can be piloted incrementally on a small scale before large-scale adoption.
- There is a flexible and understandable process or framework that can be easily implemented by an interprofessional oral health care team.

### **Aim #3 – Improves the dental care experience for veteran populations**

- A trauma informed approach is utilized within the practice.
- The approach is inclusive of all populations.
- The direct (e.g., cost of care) and indirect costs (e.g., lost wages or travel time) to patients to physically see a provider are reduced.

### **Aim #4 – Improve the care experience for oral health care workers providing care to veteran populations**

- When the practice is utilized, oral health care providers perceive value when engaging patients.
- Oral health care providers have been effectively trained on the approach/method.
- Competency was achieved with training and education in a timely manner.
- The approach would not place unnecessary additional burden on the care team.

Using the four aims identified above, best practice submissions were scored on the evidence submitted to support each aim. Questions under each aim were scored 1 - 4 using the following rubric:

**1 = Very Low** Evidence is insufficient to assess due to limited demonstrated impact, important flaws in measurements, gaps in the care delivery, or lack of information on important metrics.

**2 = Low** Evidence is sufficient to determine some demonstrated impact, but the strength of the evidence is limited, is not generalizable to routine clinical practice or care coordination, or lacks strong support on health outcomes.

**3 = Moderate** Evidence includes consistent demonstrated impact, the strength of the evidence is sound, is somewhat generalizable to routine clinical practice, and produces measurable support on health outcomes.

**4 = High** Evidence includes robust demonstrated impact, the strength of the evidence is outstanding, can be generalized to routine clinical practice, and produces strong measurable support on health outcomes.

An example of the scoring matrix is included below for clarity:

SCALE	1	2	3	4
<b>Improve health outcomes for the veteran population</b>				
There is a significant operational history and evidence of improvement since the start date.				
Care coordination and collaboration between dental, medical, and behavioral health is incorporated.				
Addresses the social determinants of health as part of clinical care delivery and/or program operations.				
Patient-centered care delivery is implemented in a manner that prioritizes tracking both short and long term changes in oral health status				

### ***Step Three: Practice Submission and Scoring***

AIDPH and NNOHA formed a workgroup of oral health leaders from diverse professional backgrounds to direct project efforts. Workgroup leaders reviewed and finalized the protocol and scoring criteria through consensus discussion. The working group refined the definitions of best, practicing, and promising practices, then finalized the call for submissions.

A call for submissions was published throughout the fall of 2022. Practices were collected via an electronic form which closed at the end of 2022. Submissions were blinded and provided to workgroup members to review and independently score. Any submissions with disparate scores were marked for additional discussion. After two rounds of vetting and discussion, all practice submission categories were finalized.

This document includes the final classification of submitted programs as well as brief descriptions of the programs mission, vision, funding sources and main activities.



**PROGRAM  
DESCRIPTIONS**



**Name:** [Dental Day for Veterans \(Arizona Mission of Mercy\)](#)

**Parent organization:** Central Arizona Dental Society Foundation

**Location:** Phoenix, AZ

**Initially founded:** 2015

**Number of veterans served annually:** 400

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Best practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Promising practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Promising practice

**Program description and main activities:**

This veteran specific Mission of Mercy is an annual two-day clinical event that provides free, charitable dental care to veterans and primarily addresses their pain and infection issues. During the event veterans receive medical screenings as well as dental screenings. The dental screenings include radiographs and examination allowing dentists to triage the veterans' dental needs. From this triage, hygiene treatment such as cleanings, extractions, root canal therapy, fillings, and dentures are provided based on need and availability.

The event primarily addresses the pain and infection that veterans are experiencing. Dental Day for Veterans and AZMOM tracks the number of veterans served as well as number and types of procedures provided during the event. This event relies completely on volunteer dental professionals to provide the dental care. During this veterans exclusive event, staff on-hand is proactive in providing veterans with information regarding sliding scale and low cost clinics in the community. The Arizona Dental Association provides updated lists of eligible clinics for event staff to direct veterans to contact post-event. AZMOM utilizes a cloud-based electronic medical record for the event and has over 7 years of patient encounter data. AZMOM reports that it appears many veterans return annually to receive preventive services at the event in addition to other dental needs.

**Funding sources**

- Independent donations
- Grant funding from non-profit 501(c)3 organizations
- Donated clinical provider time and supplies for dental care services

**Takeaways:**

- Inclusion of medical and dental screenings can better identify whole health needs of veteran populations
- Tracking of types and frequencies of procedures completed during these events provides a cross-sectional insight to veteran oral health need in the community
- Partnering with a state dental society foundation can better recruit volunteer dentists for volunteer events

**Additional information**

- [AZMOM and Phoenix College Dental Day for Veterans](#)



**Name:** [Everyone for Veterans](#)

**Parent organization:** Everyone for Veterans

**Location:** serving veterans nationally, headquarters in Issaquah, WA

**Initially founded:** 2017

**Number of veterans served annually:** 100

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Best practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Best practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Best practice

### **Program description and activities**

Everyone For Veterans (E4V) offers a no-cost comprehensive dental care program, by which they coordinate the provision of vital dental health services to eligible veterans who otherwise cannot afford it. E4V's mission is to empower veterans to lead healthy and fulfilled lives by providing them with resources, support, and comprehensive dental care. E4V serves veterans and their spouses across the nation that are experiencing financial hardship. This program aims to transform veterans' lives Veterans' lives enabling them to be better family members and active members of their local communities.

E4V demonstrates an unique and effective model of care. The organization recruits dental professionals to provide pro-bono dental services in the communities where the veterans live. By sourcing dentists in the communities where they live, this travel burden is lifted, and the likelihood for the continuation of care is increased. The veterans receive comprehensive, not one-time urgent care, dental treatment based on their unique needs. Participating veterans are surveyed following their treatment, which allows E4V to measure impact, success, and overall satisfaction of the participating veterans. E4V recognizes that veterans may have had poor care experiences previously, but were hesitant to speak up because they did not want to appear ungrateful. Utilizing these surveys allows E4V to ensure the veterans' have a positive care experience and adjust community partnerships as needed based on this feedback. Following a review with the University of Washington's Evans School of Business, the program learned that many veterans are reluctant to ask for help as they feel it conveys weaknesses or that by accepting care, they are taking that opportunity from a more deserving individual. This feedback has allowed E4V to change their communication strategies to encourage veteran participation in the program. Since its founding in 2017, E4V has expanded their capacity and improved their application process to ensure effective, efficient identification of need and connection to an appropriate dentist in the community.

### **Funding sources**

- Independent donations
- Grant funding from non-profit 501(c)3 organizations
- Grant funding from corporate giving, venture philanthropy, or 501(c)4 organizations
- Donated clinical provider time and supplies for dental care services
- Shop to Support Programs (e.g., AmazonSmile)
- Fundraising events

### **Takeaways**

- Identifying dentists in the community who are interested in donating services can decrease the travel burden veterans may face in seeking dental treatment
- Utilization of surveys of veterans post-treatment allows for patient feedback regarding services received and adjustment of community relationships as needed
- Opportunity for continued, sustained preventive care in addition to addressing immediate dental needs allows for creation of a true dental home for the veterans

### **Additional information:**

- [Facebook - Everyone for Veterans](#)
- [Twitter - Everyone for Veterans](#)
- [Everyone for Veterans approaches milestone of 700 treated](#)



**Name:** [Florida Mission of Mercy - Veterans First Initiative](#)  
**Parent organization:** Florida Dental Association Foundation  
**Location:** Tallahassee, FL  
**Initially founded:** 2014  
**Number of veterans served annually:** 200 - 250

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Best practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Best practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Promising practice

### **Program description and main activities**

The FDA Foundation launched its signature philanthropic program in 2014, the Florida Mission of Mercy (FLA-MOM). FLA-MOM is a large-scale, two-day, professional dental clinic that provides care to any patient at no cost, with the goal of serving the underserved and uninsured in Florida — those who would otherwise go without care. Since 2014, FLA-MOM has provided \$12.82 million in donated care to 12,491 patients. FLA-MOM travels around the state and has been held in Tampa, Jacksonville, Pensacola, Fort Myers, Orlando, and Tallahassee.

Each FLA-MOM clinic offers a comprehensive array of services, including oral health education, radiographs, oral cancer screenings, extractions, fillings, root canals, cleanings and immediate dentures and partials. Dental care is delivered via volunteer dental professionals including dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants, among others. FLA-MOM also provides a resource guide of local community dental programs and clinics where patients can access routine care. The Florida Mission of Mercy Veterans First Initiative is a special engagement where approximately 200 veterans have priority access to receive services the day before the public dental clinic.

FLA-MOM measures its impact via post-treatment exit interviews and patient surveys and an integrated digital platform that collects clinical data for each FLA-MOM participating including radiographs and dental services provided during the event. Through these measures, FLA-MOM is able to assess the total number of patients treated, the number and types of procedures, and the total volume of donated dental services. Their [2016 Impact Study Report](#) provides insight regarding patient characteristics, demographics, and dental use patterns. This systematic data collection provides insight to oral health needs of the community and identifies opportunities to further address oral health care access challenges based on their community-specific needs. Clinic leaders serve on the planning committee for each of these events and participate in monthly or bi-monthly phone conferences. Clinical protocols are developed by this group and shared with the 1000+ volunteers prior to the program. Before the event, on-site orientation is completed to ensure understanding and adherence to these developed protocols.

### **Funding sources**

- Independent donations
- Grant funding from non-profit 501(c)3 organizations
- Grant funding from corporate giving, venture philanthropy, or 501(c)4 organizations
- State government or agency grant monies
- Donated clinical provider time and supplies for dental care services

### **Takeaways**

- Post treatment interviews with veterans gives insight regarding patient care experience
- Inclusion of clinic leaders in planning committee better informs coordination of volunteers and execution of the event, including successful delivery of dental treatment
- Tracking of number of patients, types and frequency of procedures rendered during events provides cross-sectional insight of veteran oral health needs in the community

### **Additional information**

- [Florida Dental Association Foundation](#)
- [2022 Florida Mission of Mercy Dental Event](#)



**Name:** [Franklin County Veterans Service Commission Dental Program](#)  
**Parent organization:** Franklin County Veterans Service Commission (FCVSC)  
**Location:** Columbus, OH  
**Initially founded:** 2007  
**Number of veterans served:** 200

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Promising practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Promising practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Promising practice

### **Program description and activities**

Together, FCVSC & PrimaryOne Health (P1H), a federally qualified health center, mutually promote and carry out each entity's vision to create healthy communities by improving healthcare access, increasing continuity of healthcare and by reducing the incidence of preventable diseases and establish an inter-agency system to provide a per visit, fee-based preventative dental health care package for eligible veterans and their dependents in need of this service. Each completed visit, authorized by a FCVSC Case Manager will be paid by the FCVSC on behalf of veterans, and their legal dependents.

This program focuses on delivery of direct patient care. FCVSC case managers refer patients to P1H for a comprehensive dental exam. There is typically a 4-6 week waiting period of new veteran patients; P1H holds a dedicated new patient appointment slot for FCVSC referrals to minimize wait time. At the comprehensive exam, the dentist creates a treatment plan which is divided into treatment that can be provided at P1H and needed treatment that is beyond P1H scope. The treatment plan is sent to FCVSC for approval. The turnaround time for treatment plan approval is less than two weeks. Once approved, P1H contacts the patient to schedule treatment that can be rendered at their dental clinic. FCVSC pays P1H for treatment as it is rendered. FCVSC handles referrals to third-party resources to perform services beyond the scope of P1H. Notably, FCVSC has a "no tolerance" policy on no shows and failure to comply with this may result in the veteran's loss of financial support for dental care.

### **Funding sources**

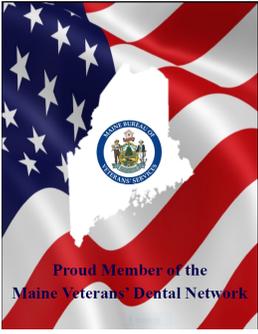
FCVSC reimbursement for approved care

### **Takeaways**

- Partnership with a veterans' facing organization creates opportunity to engage with this population in a non-clinical setting
- Utilizing a dedicated appointment slot in the clinic schedule ensures availability and timely scheduled of veterans referred for dental care
- Development and submission of anticipated treatment needs to the funding organization allows for improved budgeting

### **Additional information**

- [PrimaryOne Health](#)



**Name:** [Maine Veterans' Dental Network](#)

**Parent Organization:** Bureau of Maine Veterans' Services

**Location:** Augusta, ME

**Initially founded:** 2021

**Number of veterans served annually:** 357

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Best Practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Best Practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Promising Practice

### **Program description and main activities**

The mission of the Maine Veterans' Dental Network (MVDN) is to provide free dental care to eligible veterans residing in Maine. This program provides direct access to treatment for Maine's veterans including checkups, cleanings, radiographs, fluoride treatments, and the creation of a dental plan if additional work is needed, as well as establishing a dental home for many of the veterans who have not seen a dentist since they were discharged from the military. Current program structure allows up to \$500 worth of grant funded dental treatment, and sometimes more on a case-by-case basis. Most of the veterans are primarily seeking basic oral healthcare (preventative, diagnostic, and restorative treatments), but the program will take veterans who seek emergency dental care due to pain and/or infection and those seeking oral surgery and major restorative dental care (extractions and dentures). If the required treatment exceeds the grant funding, the veterans are responsible for the remaining balance, and feedback from them indicates that they feel this is fair. There are 22 participating dental clinics across the state of Maine that provide dental care through this program (including the use of a mobile dental clinic). The clinics are aware of the mental health challenges veterans face including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Military Sexual Trauma, and utilize trauma-informed approaches with the veterans to create a safe space in which they can receive dental care. The MVDN tracks the number of veterans served by each participating clinic as well as the procedures provided and amount of funding utilized to deliver these services. The care is provided on a first come, first serve basis until the grant funding runs out. In both 2021 and 2022, that occurred for the southern and central parts of the state within the first four to five months of the year. The MVDN is continually seeking additional grant funders and in 2023, the Maine Masonic Charitable Foundation provided \$30,000 in grant support. The MVDN's long-term goal is to expand their program to serve more veterans, including utilizing the mobile dental clinic to reach residents of the six Maine Veterans' Homes in our state.

### **Funding sources**

- Grant funding from corporate giving, venture philanthropy, or 501(c)4 organizations
- State government or agency grant monies

### **Takeaways**

- Creation of a participating network of clinics more easily allows direction of veterans to specific sites who are able to provide dental treatment
- Utilization of trauma-informed care approach for dental care allows veterans to receive treatment in a safe, comfortable environment.
- Inclusion of preventive dental services in covered care can decrease risk of dental disease in the future.

### **Additional information:**

- [Mills Administration Launches Maine Veterans' Dental Network in Partnership with Northeast Delta Dental](#)
- [Governor Mills announces Maine Veterans' Dental Network to continue services with \\$100,000 grant from Northeast Delta Dental](#)
- [Maine Veterans' Dental Network receives Excellence Award](#)
- [Governor Mills Announces Maine Veterans' Dental Network to Continue Services with \\$200,000 Grant from Northeast Delta Dental](#)
- [UNE to provide free dental care to veterans as part of the Maine Veterans' Dental Network](#)
- [UMA Bangor Dental Hygiene Clinic Partners with Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services to Provide Free Dental Hygiene Services to Veterans](#)



**Name:** [Recruit a Smile](#)

**Parent organization:** [Recruit a Smile is associated with Tunxis Community College and the Tunxis Veterans Oasis](#)

**Location:** Farmington, CT

**Initially founded:** 2017

**Number of veterans served annually:** 10-20

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Best practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Best practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Best practice

### **Program description and main activities**

Recruit a Smile provides oral health supplies, oral health education, and preventative oral health adjuncts for the student and faculty veteran population at Tunxis Community College. Dental prophylaxis and scaling and root planing are performed by the students observed under faculty supervision at UConn Health Center in Farmington, Connecticut. Restorative options are available to the veteran population around the state of Connecticut on a sliding fee scale or free basis based upon veteran students' needs. Veteran students with restorative needs are then connected with dentists in the community who will provide free or reduced cost care through a partnership with the Connecticut State Dental Association (CSDA). The mission of Recruit a Smile is to provide a system of oral care to an overlooked population, especially in relation to dental health and overall health. The program aims to provide comfort, education and compassion to veterans while providing them with a dental home and immediate access to much needed dental care. Looking towards the future, the program aims to provide preventative and restorative dental care access to all student veterans at the Community College and University levels throughout the state of Connecticut while providing a dental home. This will also provide them with oral health education and access to dental supplies and will in turn decrease the rates of caries and periodontal disease and all factors associated with these dental diseases. Hygiene students at Tunxis Community College work with Recruit a Smile to provide educational presentations to the veteran students. Recruit a Smile reports an increase in veteran engagement with Recruit a Smile following these presentations and an opportunity to meet the dental hygiene students outside of a clinic setting. Tunxis student veterans receive free preventive dental care, including prophylaxis, cleaning, fluoride, exams and radiographs from the Tunxis Community College dental hygiene students at the college's clinic at UConn Health. This is funded through donations. The student veterans are also referred to area dentists who will provide restorative care for free or at a reduced cost. Along with the services provided to the veteran student population, oral health education and supplies are provided to the student veterans at the [Tunxis Veterans Oasis](#) at Tunxis Community College. With the consolidation of all community colleges in Connecticut, the Veterans Oasis and Recruit a Smile are able to provide additional oral health education and resources, including toothbrushes and toothpaste, to more student veterans. Research into the Veteran population's dental health post-dental prophylaxis as well as surveys to ensure a consistent quality of care are performed. The program is planning to expand to three other local colleges within the next year.

### **Funding sources**

- Independent donations
- Grant funding from non-profit 501(c)3 organizations
- Donated clinical provider time and supplies for dental care services
- Long-term endowment
- 2019 small grant award for research into the Veteran Population

### **Takeaways**

- Creating an opportunity for veterans to engage with their providers prior to the clinical experience (e.g., cleaning) allows for initiation of the patient-provider relationship in a neutral environment
- Partnering with a veteran facing organization within a community space allows for daily engagement opportunities
- Partnering with state dental organization can identify dentists in the community who are interested and willing to provide restorative treatment to veterans at no or reduced cost

### **Additional information:**

- [2019 AAPHD Student Chapter Reports](#)
- [AAPHD Small Grants Program](#)



**Name:** Resi-Dental Program  
**Parent organization:** [Community Health Centers of Benton and Linn Counties](#)  
**Location:** Corvallis, OR  
**Initially founded:** 2018  
**Number of veterans served annually:** 45

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Promising practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Promising practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Promising practice

### **Program description and main activities**

Community Health Centers of Benton and Linn Counties provide a medical home that promotes and supports health and wellness. This collaboration accomplishes this by (1) bringing together medical, dental, mental health, and addiction services, (2) offering care that is inclusive and available to anyone regardless of insurance status, economic status, language, age or health status, (3) providing services at clinic locations in Benton and Linn Counties, (4) working together with patients/consumers/clients to have them involved in decisions and actions to improve their health, and (5) coordinating community partnerships to provide a broader range of services than can be offered by the health center alone. Intentionally committing to being a leader in changing health care delivery by modeling an integrated health home that provides access to quality care.

For the Oregon Veterans' Home specifically, the Resi-Dental Program provides onsite dental hygiene, preventive/diagnostic, restorative, and removable prosthetic services to residents. The program tracks the types of procedures being performed on-site as well as the care requests from the on-site veterans. A Dental Outreach Coordinator is responsible for treatment and follow-up scheduling.

As the care is delivered on-site, this helps eliminate transportation barriers resident veterans may otherwise face. The program can usually provide care within 4 weeks of request from the resident. Resi-Dental recognizes the need for flexibility and works with residents veterans' availability around waking time, meals, as well as therapy or other activities the resident may be attending. When there are ambulatory issues, the veteran is seen bedside by the dental provider when appropriate.

### **Funding sources**

- Grant Funding from non-profit 501(c)3 organizations
- Patient payments for care services
- Medicaid or Medicare reimbursement for services provided

### **Takeaways**

- Utilization of mobile and/or portable dental equipment allows veterans to receive dental treatment on-site at the nursing homes and eliminates transportation barriers veterans' may face otherwise
- Flexibility of providers on-site to the nursing facility schedule creates potential to see more veterans during site visits
- A dedicated dental outreach coordinator improves efficiency in scheduling of treatment and follow-up needs of the resident veterans

### **Additional information:**

- <https://www.bentonlinnhealthcenters.org/adult-oral-health/>



**Name:** [Smiles for Our Heroes](#)  
**Parent organization:** Zufall Health Center  
**Location:** Morristown, NJ & Dover, NJ  
**Initially founded:** 2017  
**Number of veterans served annually:** 140 - 200

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Best practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Best practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Best practice

**Program description and main activities:**

Zufall Health Center hosts a two-day event once a year during which eligible veterans are provided free dental services including exams and cleanings, oral cancer assessments, radiographs, fillings, and dentures. Free food, giveaways, and other resources are available as well. There is an opportunity for veterans to connect with other local organizations such as SNAP and Art for Veterans that can address other non-dental needs. Prior to the two-day event, there are outreach events that occur around that include dental screenings. At these outreach events the mobile van will go to veteran-specific community events (e.g., [Operation Stand Down](#)) to do radiographs, exams, and prophylaxis cleanings prior to the event so the veterans can receive other types of dental treatment at the actual event. Other individuals who do not participate in pre-screening receive appropriate care for their triaged needs.

The program initially began as a single-day care event. Zufall Health Center had identified a need amongst the veteran population in their community. The health center leveraged an existing relationship with the Delta Dental Foundation to identify volunteers interested in helping with these single-day events. This includes coordinating with the New Jersey Dental Association, New Jersey Hygiene Association, and New Jersey Dental Assisting Association to recruit volunteer dental professionals interested in providing free dental care during the event. Utilizing portable equipment and large tents, Zufall Health Center was able to expand care opportunities for veterans seeking dental treatment. Zufall Health Center tracks the number and types of procedures provided during the two-day event.

They also collaborate with other health centers to provide referrals for veterans seeking follow-up care following the event. The program has allowed veterans to find and establish a dental home. Approximately half of the veterans who attend the two-day event establish a dental home at Zufall Health Center. Zufall Health Center holds specific appointment blocks at their clinics to ensure veterans can complete treatment that was initiated during the two-day event (e.g., completion of denture fabrication).

**Funding sources:**

- Independent donations
- Grant funding from non-profit 501(c)3 organizations
- State government or agency grant monies
- Medicaid or Medicare reimbursement for services provided

**Takeaways:**

- Pre-event screenings allows for triage and opportunity to deliver more efficient, definitive care during the event
- Identification of clinics for referral for continued care post-event allows veterans an opportunity to establish a dental home
- Collaboration with veteran facing community partners allows for engagement of veterans prior to the event, including opportunity for pre-screening events

**Additional information:**

- [Video: 2019 Smiles for Our Heroes](#)
- [Zufall Health Creates Healthy Smiles in Time for Veterans' Day and All Year-Round](#)
- [Free Dental Care Provided for 200 Veterans at Smiles for Our Heroes Event](#)



## College of Dentistry and Dental Clinics

**Name:** University of Iowa College of Dentistry Veterans Dental Health Program

**Parent organization:** [University of Iowa College of Dentistry](#)

**Location:** Iowa City, IA

**Initially founded:** 2016

**Number of veterans served annually:** 10 - 20

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Promising practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Promising practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Promising practice

### **Program description and main activities:**

The University of Iowa College of Dentistry has a \$250,000 endowment fund projected to provide approximately \$12,500 of veterans dental care each year. Additionally, annual fundraising activities generate an additional \$5,000 - \$6,000 each year. The mission of this program is to provide dental care for veterans with financial difficulties, while also providing dental students with the ability to complete their dental school requirements providing care to an underserved population.

These dental services offered include both preventive as well as restorative treatment. Most care needed by this patient population includes extractions and restoration of dentition with removable dentures. All care provided by the dental students is supervised by a licensed clinic faculty at the University of Iowa College of Dentistry.

The program runs throughout the year and anticipates that the number of veterans served will triple in the next year. The program is offered year-round if funds are available. Veterans are identified when they visit the dental clinic for an in-take exam and their eligibility for financial support through the endowment is determined.

### **Funding sources:**

- Independent donations
- Long-term endowment

### **Takeaways:**

- Provides a clinic-based education experience for pre-doctoral students to engage with an underserved population that may foster a desire to continue caring for this population post-graduation
- Inclusion of dentures following extractions and restorative treatment allows veterans to be restored to a more complete function dentition
- Dental schools often have experience in engaging with underserved populations who struggle to access dental care in private practice settings

### **Additional information:**

- [UI College of Dentistry helps veterans smile again](#)
- [UI College of Dentistry Veterans Resources](#)



**Name:** [VET SMILES Project](#)

**Parent organization:** Veteran Smiles Foundation in collaboration with East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine

**Location:** Wake Forest, NC

**Initially founded:** 2020

**Number of veterans served annually:** 150

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Emerging practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Emerging practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Emerging practice

**Program description and main activities:**

This program provides year-round financial support to low-income veterans in North Carolina seeking to improve their oral health. Eligible veterans receive education, advocacy, and financial support. The financial support ensures completion of individual dental care plans as developed at an initial triage appointment.

This program covers preventive services, restorative treatment, extractions, as well as crowns and dentures. The care is delivered by predoctoral dental students at East Carolina University School of Dental Medicine, under the supervision of a clinical director, who is a dentist and veteran himself. While the program does request that veterans donate 50% of their individual cost to “pay it forward” for future veterans, financial constraints of the participating veterans make this challenge to fulfill. However, failure to make this donation does not exclude the participating veteran from services.

The program aims to provide an opportunity for the veterans to establish a dental home rather than seeking single-event, need-based care. The dental clinic consults with medical professionals when needed, but acknowledges challenges in working with their local VA to obtain information regarding shared patients.

**Funding sources:**

- Independent donations
- Grant funding from non-profit 501c3 organizations
- Patient payments for care services

**Takeaways:**

- Identification of a clinic leader who is a dentist and a veteran can provide additional insight regarding the unique needs of veterans who are seeking dental care
- Providing financial support based on identified treatment needs can better help veterans receive comprehensive dental care
- Dental schools have experience in providing care to underserved populations and dental students gain valuable clinical experience from these opportunities

**Additional information:**

- [ECU event provides dental care to eastern North Carolina veterans in need](#)



**Name:** [Veterans Smile Program](#)

**Parent organization:** Veterans Smile Program

**Location:** Montgomery, IL

**Initially founded:** 2015

**Number of veterans served annually:** 40 veterans

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Emerging practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Emerging practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Emerging practice

**Program description and activities:**

The Veterans Smile Program provides the necessary funding for free, critical dental care to eligible veterans in need and which is not currently covered or provided to the majority of the nation's veterans through the VA. This dental care includes dental exams, radiographs, extractions, as well as full and partial dentures. The program pairs eligible veterans with volunteer dentists in the community who provide the care at no cost to the veteran. In exchange for the care rendered, Veterans Smiles Programs covers the cost of eligible services. The organization participates in community events as well to raise awareness regarding their mission and fundraise to support coverage of services.

**Funding sources:**

- Independent donations
- Grant funding from non-profit 501(c)3 organizations

**Takeaways:**

- Providing individual dentists in the community with financial compensation in exchange for treatment of the veterans can encourage more dentist participation in the program
- Identifying eligible services allows the program to budget regarding the number of veterans that can be cared for during the fiscal year
- Program presence at community events allows for additional fundraising opportunities and engagement to raise awareness of services available

**Additional information:**

- [Facebook: Veterans Smile Program](#)



**Name:** [Victors for Veterans \(V4V\)](#)

**Parent organization:** United Way of Northwest Michigan

**Location:** Traverse City, MI

**Initially founded:** 2012

**Number of veterans served annually:** 60

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Best practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Best practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Best practice

#### **Program description and main activities:**

This program is part of the University of Michigan School of Dentistry. There are three clinic locations: the University of Michigan School of Dentistry dental clinic, one clinic in Brighton, and a third clinic in Pontiac. The program provides comprehensive care to veterans with disabilities, experiencing homelessness, or without insurance who have incomes at or below 200% of federal poverty guidelines. The program utilizes volunteer hours of dentists and pre-doctoral dental students to deliver care. Through these volunteer dentists and pre-doctoral dental students, veterans receive comprehensive dental care at no cost to them. In May, veterans are triaged by dentists at University of Michigan School of Dentistry and appointments are scheduled on subsequent Fridays for the year. Each veteran is to complete all necessary care by April of the following year. The process begins again in May with a cohort of new veterans. Patient navigators and care coordinators are utilized to help facilitate efficient, timely care delivery. The participating veterans are not responsible for the cost of dental care, except for placement of an implant post. However, there is a separate donation fund that can often cover this expense. With the expansion of the clinics, V4V plans to include wrap-around services including support groups and social work for community resources for veteran patients. Prior to entering the program, each veteran is interviewed as part of the registration process. This interview aims to identify “triggers” veterans may experience and a discussion for a planned approach to ensure a comfortable, safe dental appointment for the veteran. The pre-doctoral students learn how to accommodate patients facing mental health challenges, including post-traumatic stress, as well as other contributory co-morbidities to ensure comprehensive, person-centered care. Veterans complete surveys regarding their satisfaction with the dental students providing care and if applicable, fabricated dentures. In addition to the services provided by pre-doctoral students, V4V partners with local dentists who volunteer to treat eligible veterans on a case-by-case basis. Each volunteer dentist donates a specific number of cases and V4V coordinates and tracks this care to ensure one dentist does not become overloaded. Volunteer dentists can also receive continuing education credit for participation in this program. Additionally, V4V collaborates with primary care physicians and case workers at the VA to assist the veteran with other care that might be needed.

#### **Funding sources:**

- Independent donations
- Grant funding from non-profit 501(c)3 organizations
- Grant funding from corporate giving, venture philanthropy, or 501(c)4 organizations
- Medicaid or Medicare reimbursement for services provided
- Donated clinical provider time and supplies for dental care services

#### **Takeaways:**

- Provision of dental care by predoctoral dental students under the supervision of a dentist creates clinical exposure for this specific patient population and learning experience in patient engagement and management
- Intake forms that identify “triggers” or other concerns that may influence the veteran’s dental care experience can better inform and prepare the dental team before engaging with the veteran in a clinic setting to create a safe, comfortable care environment
- Recorded feedback from veteran patients receiving services allow for evaluation of patients’ care experience and identifies opportunities for improvement

#### **Additional information:**

- [Victors for Veterans: Giving Them Something to Smile About](#)



**Name:** [VOCARE](#)

**Parent organization:** New York University College of Dentistry

**Location:** New York, New York

**Initially founded:** 2021

**Number of veterans served annually:** 1,100

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:** Emerging practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Emerging practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Emerging practice

**Program Description and main activities:**

In partnership with the US VETSMILE program and the New York VA Hospitals, New York University College of Dentistry (NYU) provides dental services for veterans at no cost. This program seeks to provide comprehensive dental services to veterans in the New York City area who are not eligible to receive those services through the VA. The VA New York Harbor Healthcare System refers eligible Veterans to NYU for dental care. Pre-doctoral dental students are responsible for the delivery of dental care under the supervision of clinic faculty dentists. This project aims to create a dental home for veterans. The school reports a high anecdotal satisfaction from participating veterans.

**Funding sources:**

- Independent donations
- Grant funding from corporate giving, venture philanthropy, or 501(c)4 organizations
- State government or agency grant monies
- Donated clinical provider time and supplies for dental care services

**Takeaways:**

- Partnership with the VA Hospital allows for a direct referral of veterans with an identified dental need to a clinic site that can deliver care
- Funding sources that will cover cost of care for veterans helps eliminate financial barriers these patients face in receiving comprehensive dental treatment
- Provision of care by predoctoral dental students under the supervision of a licensed dentist allows leverage of another component of the dental workforce and provides valuable clinical experience to the students

**Additional information:**

- [NYU Dentistry Partners with VA to Provide Dental Care to Veterans](#)



**Name:** [Will You See One Veteran Program \(WYSOV\)](#)

**Parent organization:** Dental Lifeline Network

**Location:** National program with headquarters in Denver, CO

**Initially founded:** 1985

**Number of veterans served annually:** approximately 1,000

**Patient recruitment, personalized community, and front office excellence:**  
Promising practice

**Clinical care delivery:** Promising practice

**Patient and community engagement:** Promising practice

### **Program description and activities.**

Dental Lifeline Network (DLN) is a national charitable organization whose mission is to improve the oral health of people, including veterans, with disabilities or who are elderly or medically fragile and have no other way to get help. They accomplish their mission by developing and coordinating collaborative relationships that provide essential resources for direct-service programs, especially charitable care. DLN recruits eligible veterans eligible for the program through partner organizations. This includes a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between DLN and the VA to enable referrals. Case managers then coordinate the care for the veteran from triage through completion of the case. The case managers are typically from social work backgrounds and able to recognize trauma and provide mental health support for the veterans well as they navigate the provision of dental care.

Volunteer dentists and dental laboratories participating in DLN agree to treat elderly, disabled, and/or medically-fragile veterans in their communities. These volunteers are able to provide comprehensive dental care beyond addressing emergencies only needs of the veterans. The case managers also provide support to these offices in helping the dentists utilize a trauma-informed approach to care. DLN and WYSOV track the number of veterans served as well as the number of participating volunteer dentists and laboratories.

### **Funding sources:**

- Independent donations
- Grant funding from non-profit 501(c) organizations
- Grant funding from corporate giving, venture philanthropy, or 501(c)4 organizations
- State government or agency grant monies
- Patient payments for care services
- Donated clinical provider time and supplies for dental care services
- Long-term endowment

### **Takeaways:**

- Case managers allow for improved coordination of care from identification of a veteran in need to arrival at an appropriate dental clinic for comprehensive dental treatment
- Development of a referral network of dentists and dental laboratories in the community who are willing to donate their services can better direct veterans to care settings where finances will not be a barrier to them receiving care
- Varied sources of funding can improve program sustainability as the program will not suffer as drastically if a single source of funding is lost

### **Additional information:**

- [Dental Lifeline Network](#)
- [Dental Lifeline Network: will you see one veteran?](#)



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