



DENTAL CARE AS A HUMAN RIGHT:

Advancing Oral Health
Justice Through Community
Empowerment

**2025 COLLOQUIUM
BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS**
MARCH 4-5, 2025

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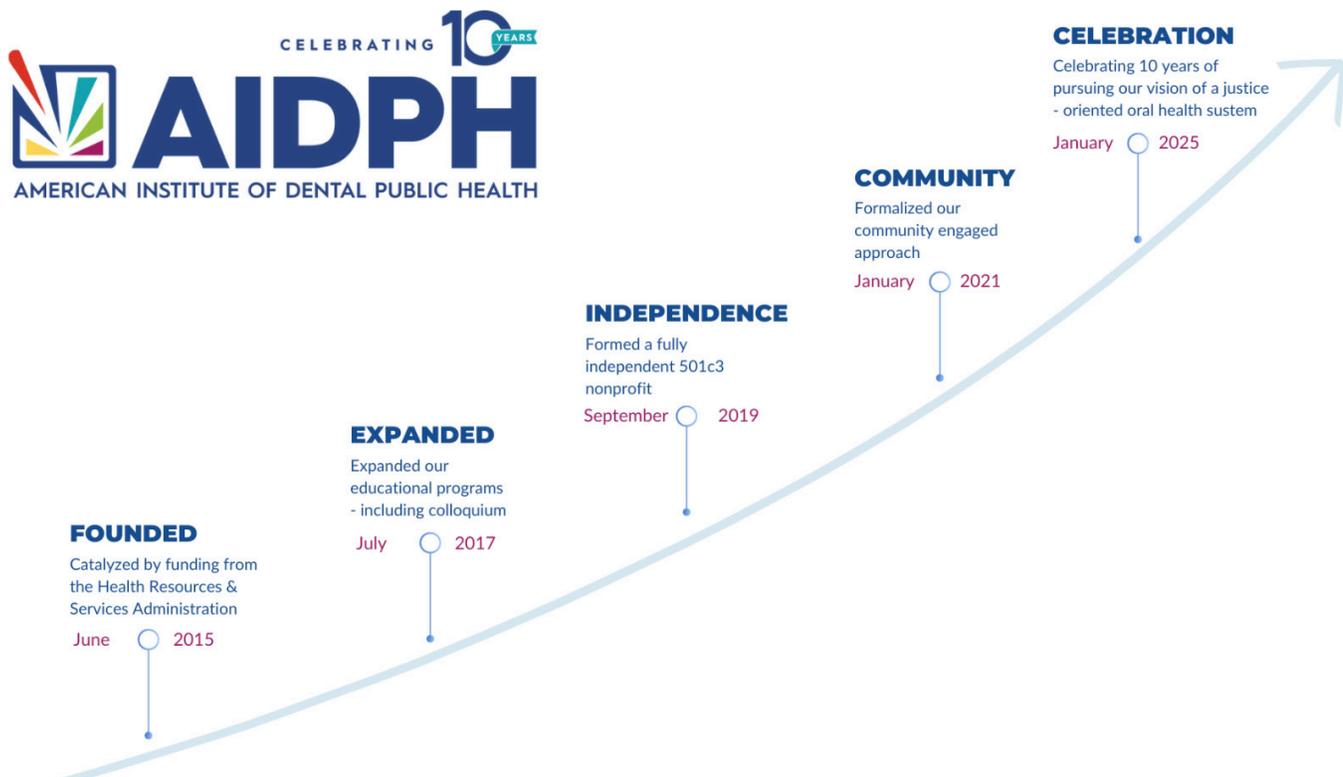
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ABOUT AIDPH

The American Institute of Dental Public Health (AIDPH) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization empowering communities to advance oral health through research, education, and advocacy. Founded in 2015, AIDPH has built a decade-long reputation for sparking change by empowering communities with the platform, tools, and experience to advance a justice-oriented oral health system. Our impact is reflected in the real change we ignite within communities and throughout the oral health ecosystem. Rooted in the belief that **dental care is a human right**, our initiatives cultivate a dedicated network of oral health professionals who are equipped to educate, activate, and mobilize. The AIDPH Colloquium is an annual convening of oral health professionals gathered to focus on innovative, emerging, and important topics supporting oral health equity and justice. The core of AIDPH's Colloquia lies in the exchange of ideas and the spirit of collaboration — they offer opportunities to engage in thought-provoking discussions, interactive learning sessions, and networking opportunities that are designed to foster personal and professional growth.



ABOUT THE 2025 COLLOQUIUM

The Colloquium leverages [AIDPH's Empowering Transformation for Community Health \(ETCH\) Framework](#) to ensure attention to adult learning principles and a health-justice mindset. This approach allows our education and leadership programming to both foster personal and professional growth and aligns with AIDPH's mission of empowering communities and advocating for justice in oral health. AIDPH's eighth Colloquium, "Dental Care as a Human Right: Oral Health Justice through Community Empowerment," invited participants to join AIDPH on March 4 and 5 in envisioning a bold future where dental public health is viewed as a fundamental human right, not a luxury: a future that prioritizes hope, humanity, and health for all.

Dental Care as a Human Right: Advancing Oral Health Justice Through Community Empowerment invited attendees to a transformative dialogue at the intersection of oral health, human rights, and social justice. Grounded in the principle that health is a fundamental human right, this event challenges inequitable systems and asks attendees to answer the question: **What will it take to redefine dental care as an essential component of healthcare?** AIDPH believes that health shouldn't be determined by zip code, identity, or income. Equitable access to affordable, high-quality dental care — rooted in empathy and lived experience — is not a privilege; it is a moral imperative. Without good oral health, good overall health is impossible.

Since the first event in 2017, the AIDPH Colloquium has played a vital role in advancing innovative and cutting-edge concepts by creating a national platform for dialogue, learning, and collective action. Historically, the colloquium has gathered advocates, researchers, clinicians, industry leaders, and community members to confront disparities and envision a more equitable future. It serves as a catalyst for innovation by fostering connections across sectors and centering community-driven solutions. The purpose of the 2025 colloquium was to accelerate the inclusion of oral health within the broader framework of healthcare justice and human rights.



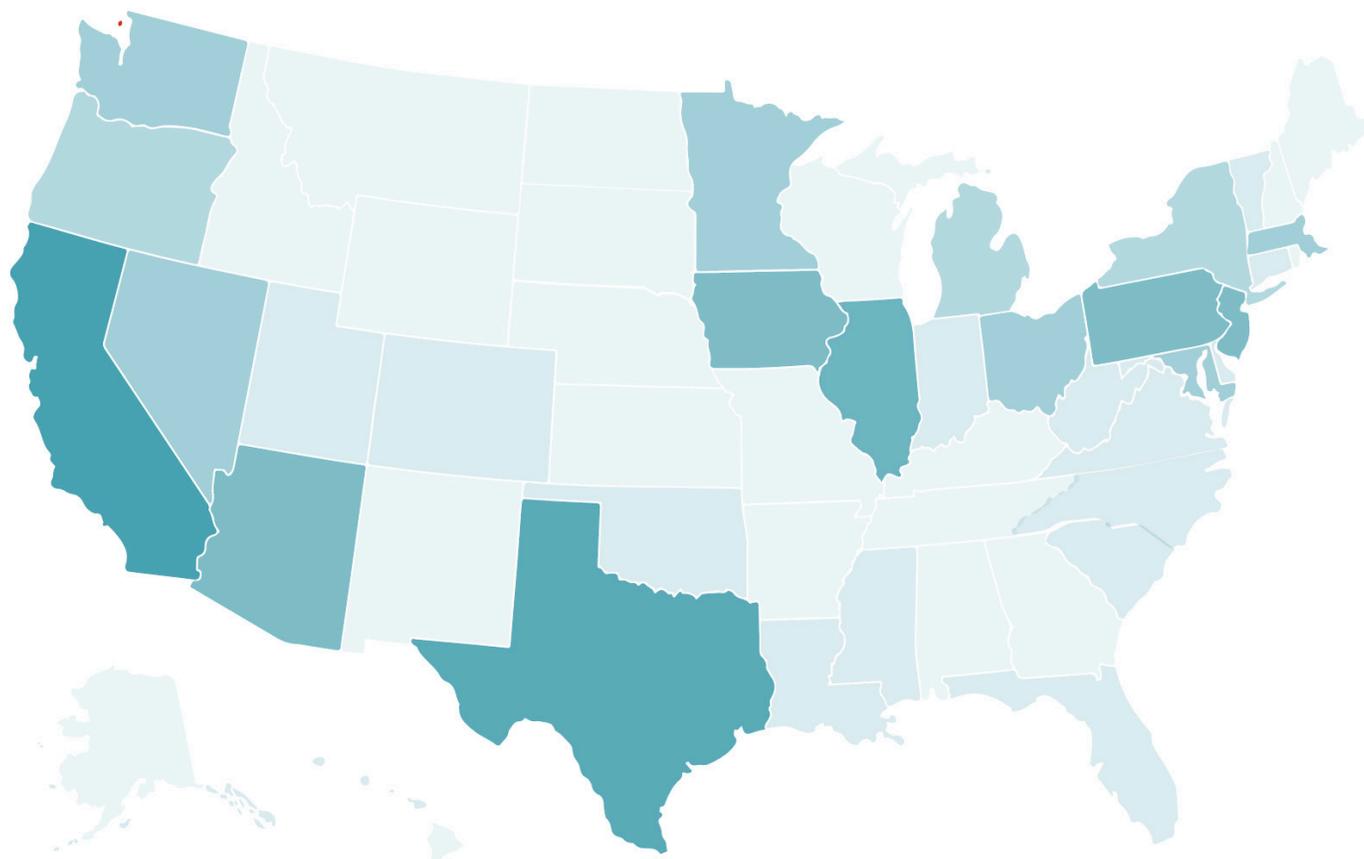
COLLOQUIUM FORMAT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The 2025 Colloquium leveraged an entirely virtual format to allow registrants to convene on a flexible online platform from the comforts of home, regardless of geographic barriers or prohibitive travel costs. During the 2025 Colloquium, we found new pathways for engagement so that the conference maintained the interactive elements that are a cornerstone of AIDPH programming. Participants answered polls and questions via Sli.do, engaged with our discussion boards, posed questions for presenters in a Q&A forum, and connected with each other during roundtable discussions, and through our Idea Incubator.

To facilitate these discussions, the AIDPH Academy was used as a centralized hub for materials and session organization. The AIDPH Academy hosts educational and leadership programming including a range of dental public health seminars, coursework, fellowships, training programs, and other continuing education opportunities. The AIDPH Academy hosts access to all sessions with CEUs available on demand for any participant who is interested in experiencing colloquium content asynchronously.

A total of 125 people registered from 35 states and Washington, DC. Over 75% of registrants (97 individuals) were first-time attendees.

COLLOQUIUM ATTENDEES BY STATE



Number of Attendees



0-17

Registrants came from a range of often-overlapping professional backgrounds, with most holding an advanced Master's or Doctorate. Most attendees who identified a professional role worked directly in patient practices as a dentist, dental hygienist, or dental assistant (51 in total). The second most represented professional sector was nonprofit or community organizations (28) and dental educators (22). AIDPH also registered 17 researchers, a small number of government workers, epidemiologists, uncategorized roles, and one dental student.

PROFESSIONAL TITLE/ROLE	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES*
Master's Degree	48
Bachelor's Degree	31
Nonprofit/Community Organizations	28
Dental Hygienist	23
Dental Educator	22
Dentist	21
Doctorate Degree	19
Researcher	17
Dental Assistant	7
Government	5
Epidemiologist	5
Other	3
Dental Student	1

**Because registrants often held multiple professional roles, the total from this chart exceeds the total number of attendees. All responses were self-reported, so some individuals may have omitted specific details about their professional and academic histories.*

SPONSORS

AIDPH relies upon the support of our generous sponsors to bring our vision for our annual Colloquia to reality. We are grateful for the generous support of Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation and CareQuest Institute for Oral Health in implementing the 2025 colloquium.



Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation (DDCOF) believes every person deserves a healthy mouth, regardless of life circumstances. By partnering with communities, the foundation works to re-imagine how our neighbors access, benefit from, and value the importance of oral health care. By implementing transformative programs and projects, the foundation intends to advance oral health equity throughout local communities across Colorado. DDCOF is a 501(c)(3) organization funded by the nonprofit Delta Dental of Colorado. To learn more, visit www.deltadentalcofoundation.org.



CareQuest Institute for Oral Health is a national nonprofit championing a more equitable future where every person can reach their full potential through excellent health. CareQuest accomplishes this through their work in philanthropy, analytics and data insights, health transformation, policy, advocacy, and education, as well as their leadership in dental benefits and innovation advancements. CareQuest Institute collaborates with thought leaders, health care providers, patients, and local, state, and federal stakeholders to accelerate oral health care transformation and create a system designed for everyone. To learn more, visit carequest.org.

AIDPH works closely with CareQuest Institute. We partnered with the organization on extensive research on veteran oral health, including [expanding coverage](#), [the economic benefits of improving veteran dental outcomes](#), [the costs of living with painful and inadequate oral healthcare](#), and [rural veteran dental care](#).



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DAY ONE:

Facilitating a Framework for Dental Care as a Human Right

KEYNOTE SESSION: DISRUPTING THE DIVIDE AND RECLAIMING ORAL HEALTH AS A HUMAN RIGHT



DAY ONE:

BRENDA HEATON, PHD, MPH (SHE/HER)

Abstract: In this session, Dr. Brenda Heaton challenged the deeply-ingrained perception of oral health as a status symbol, exposing the stark inequities that have made a healthy smile a luxury for some and an unattainable dream for others. Drawing on her career as an oral epidemiologist and her groundbreaking community-based research, Dr. Heaton

illuminated the systemic barriers—historical, political, and social—that have kept dentistry siloed from general medicine. Through compelling stories and data, she uncovered how these inequities manifest across the lifespan, from the preventable pain of early childhood caries to the devastating impacts of tooth loss in adulthood. Dr. Heaton called for an evidence base grounded in the lived experiences of patients and caregivers, centered on the real-world decisions people face about their care options, and informed by their preferences, values, and goals. This session outlined a bold vision for dismantling privilege-driven systems and forging a future where oral and systemic health unite under one roof—in both practice and principle.

Key themes from Dr. Heaton's keynote session included dental utilization, workforce capacity, storytelling, and shifting narratives through research. Presented as a fireside chat, her session set the stage for a conference emphasizing lived experiences and embracing difficult conversations as a necessary and productive step towards advancement. AIDPH Executive Director Annaliese Cothron moderated.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

 **Translating Research to Practice:** Dr. Heaton opened the conversation with an overview of her personal and professional background. She described projects including the Happy Baby, Healthy Child dental screening program at Boston University, and her involvement in securing comprehensive oral health benefits for Utah residents through her research at the University of Utah. She emphasized that meaningful change arises when research is shaped by the priorities of patients and communities and designed to compare different care delivery approaches in real-world settings—connecting evidence to decisions. Dr. Heaton said that change requires a sustained effort and that one research project is rarely enough to implement change.

 **Shifting Messaging and Cultural Narratives:** According to Heaton, the extensive focus on access in research and advocacy when discussing imbalances in dental health has overshadowed the issue of dental care utilization. Although access opens the gate to utilization, it focuses on the individual without recognizing bigger picture items, such as geographic barriers, the patient-provider experience, and care delivery issues. She underscored the need for research that not only identifies barriers but also evaluates interventions through a patient-centered lens—asking what works, for whom, and under what circumstances.

 **Care delivery integration:** The disconnect between dentistry and medicine has negatively impacted utilization rates and contributed to public misconceptions that dental care is a luxury rather than a necessity with wide-ranging implications for whole-body health and chronic disease rates. However, Heaton mentioned that dental professionals and advocates don't have to reach for 100% normative integration immediately. Dentists can make meaningful progress by opening conversations and creating initial connections. Integration strategies, when evaluated through comparative research that incorporates patient-centered outcomes, can illuminate both health and cost impacts, particularly in underserved communities. She said that medical and dental integration also helps create a united front in policy discussions, and that framing discussions around cost-saving measures can be an effective strategy to begin this dialogue.



Building Public Trust: A complex topic, increased dental utilization becomes even more complicated when factoring in public mistrust around public health. Heaton said an emphasis on restorative and preventative dental care, rather than jumping straight to extractions, can help repair feelings of skepticism and suspicion. Additionally, Heaton underscored the importance of authentically engaging patients and caregivers throughout the research and care delivery process by inviting them to help define research questions, interpret findings, and co-design solutions allows them to define oral health challenges on their terms.



Expanding Workforce Capacity: Policy and narrative shifts (aided by research) will have a limited effect without a qualified workforce prepared to meet the demands of a fractured and unequal playing field in dental public health. Heaton said we need to encourage and facilitate people from impacted communities to join the field, while also working with our existing workforce in training them on how to enhance their ability to tailor their care to local communities in need (such as trauma-informed care, treatment for people with substance use disorders, and trust-building strategies). She also pointed to the need for research that compares workforce models, scopes of practice, and training approaches to identify those that most effectively meet patient needs across diverse populations.



The Power of Storytelling: Though aware of steep public health challenges ahead, Heaton closed with a message of hope and resilience, underscoring the value of storytelling in building empathy and inspiring progress. She encouraged attendees to build common ground and make large-scale issues in dentistry feel real and relatable to people outside of the field by drawing on universal experiences with oral health challenges. Narratives, when paired with robust, patient-centered evidence, have the power to drive change, reframe public understanding, and elevate the voices of those too often left out of health research.



Access is simple. There are very clear-cut ways we can improve access, but utilization is a much more complex topic — and that's what we really need to confront when we talk about oral health inequity.



- BRENDA HEATON, PHD, MPH



ROUNDTABLE PRESENTATIONS PART ONE: NATIONAL CONVERSATIONS IN ADVANCING DENTAL CARE AS A HUMAN RIGHT

The evolving landscape of oral healthcare demands a shift from traditional models to more patient-centered, equitable, and sustainable approaches. This roundtable session convened diverse perspectives on key challenges and innovations shaping the field, from value-based care to climate-conscious practices. A central theme was the need for systemic change to address oral health disparities. Structural racism remains a significant determinant of oral health outcomes, requiring rigorous epidemiologic methods to uncover biases and inform equitable policies. Similarly, veterans and individuals with diabetes face critical gaps in dental care access, highlighting the necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration and community-driven interventions. The growing role of dental therapists in expanding access to underserved populations further underscores the importance of policy in transforming workforce models.

Beyond equity, sustainability is an emerging priority in oral healthcare, as outlined during sessions. The industry's substantial carbon footprint necessitates urgent action toward greener dental practices to mitigate climate-related health risks. Additionally, ethical imperatives call for the profession to actively dismantle systemic barriers to equitable care, moving beyond commitments to actionable solutions.

The session fostered dialogue about innovative strategies ranging from integrating oral health into broader public health frameworks to leveraging advanced analytic techniques and interdisciplinary partnerships. By aligning oral healthcare with principles of value, inclusivity, and sustainability, participants helped to collectively advance a future where access, quality, and equity define the standard of care. Participants affirmed that health research must center community-defined outcomes—such as trust, access, cultural safety, and care satisfaction—to meaningfully inform policy and practice. Patient and community voices must be embedded throughout the research process to ensure that oral health innovations are relevant, trustworthy, and actionable.



Roundtable presentations in the Day One session (full abstracts in Appendix One)

- » *The Potential of Value-Based Oral Healthcare in Transforming Oral Health Outcomes* | Kim Attanasi, PhD, BCMAS, RDH, FADHA
- » *Unmasking Structural Racism in Dental Public Health: Methodological Gaps, Approaches, and Lessons from the HRS* | Rohit Baal Balasundaram, BDS, MPH, PhD(c)
- » *Promoting Sustainable Practices in Oral Healthcare: A Roundtable Discussion* | Janice Evans Hawkins, PhD, RN, CNS, FAAN
- » *Dental Therapists: Increasing Access, Expanding the Dental Team, and Promoting Economic Development* | Esther Lopez, DDS, MPH
- » *Bridging the Gap: The Intersection of Diabetes and Oral Health in Public Health Practice* | Mannat Tiwana, BDS/MPH(c)
- » *Learning Together: Enhancing Dental Quality of Life for People with Mental Health Conditions* | Michelle Zechner, PhD, MSW, LSW, CPRP



WORKING PANEL: FROM VISION TO ACTION - BUILDING A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN AGENDA FOR ORAL HEALTH JUSTICE

SPEAKERS:



Keri Eason, MA, PhD
(she/her)



Janice Evans Hawkins,
PhD, RN, CNS, FAAN
(she/her)



Cody Price, MPH
(he/him)

MODERATOR:



Annaliese Cothron,
DHSc, MS, CPH
(she/her)

This dialogue on Community Engaged Research (CEnR) and patient-centered CER was collaboratively developed by AIDPH's Oral Health Community Engaged Research Taskforce (OHCER) and Oral Health Community Advisory Board (OHCAB). This session reviewed activities developed through an Engagement Award from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). This interactive workshop empowered attendees to apply oral health patient advocacy strategies to research engagement through a community-centered lens. Grounded in insights from a consensus-driven participatory research agenda, this session explored actionable strategies for amplifying community member voices in oral health. Participants were provided tools and frameworks for integrating lived experiences, social determinants, and cultural contexts in patient-centered CER and CEnR that prioritize their unique and unmet health concerns.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS



Collective Decision-Making: Each speaker emphasized the importance of authentically connecting with impacted communities, ideally allowing members to codesign research to avoid exploitation and ensure accurate, reflective results. Price, a Health Policy Research Analyst at the Texas Health Institute, shared an example success story with ongoing research with the St. David's Foundation, which utilizes varied formats, including public art and photo storytelling, to allow community members a variety of ways to express data. Hawkins, a nurse and educator with 25 years of experience at Old Dominion University, shared educational models and patient scripts that incorporate direct feedback from minorities. Eason reiterated Hawkins' and Price's sentiments, sharing how AIDPH's upcoming dental inclusion research project incorporates diverse perspectives from our OHCAB.



Ethics and Trustworthiness in Research: Echoing earlier sentiments about building patient trust, Eason and Hawkins stressed the importance of careful, strategic, and value-added partnerships. They urged viewers to be transparent in how research will be used, mindful of how questions are framed, and to avoid treating individuals as representative of an entire social group or identity. They also encouraged attendees to ask research participants for their informed consent consistently. Cody added that an often overlooked aspect of research ethics and trust is maintaining relationships after the project is over by sharing research findings and allowing for community feedback.



Funding and capacity barriers: Speakers acknowledged barriers to patient-centered CER, including time, funding, and capacity. Hawkins and Eason encouraged listeners to be deliberate in setting objectives, research infrastructure, and activities while remaining open-minded to outside-of-the-box solutions. For early-career professionals, Eason specifically advised people to seek grants and guidance from mentors to get around funding challenges. In contrast, Hawkins advised people to consider unconventional partnerships to aid in research, pursue internal funding sources, and utilize technological aids to reduce workload.



Thoughtful Communications: Price elaborated on the challenges by adding his thoughts about getting answers on time and dealing with formatting issues. He encouraged research teams to communicate the information they need by simplifying formatting and limiting unnecessary form questions, which can discourage participants from finishing a survey.



Storytelling through Research: Like Heaton expressed during her keynote session, Eason explained that storytelling using clear, digestible language makes research feel “real” and relatable to readers, ensuring they’ll pick up and implement suggestions and findings. Hawkins echoed her sentiment, saying it brings life to research, and Price added that research can cut through the noise of impersonal figures and statistics, noting that brevity is key when dealing with stakeholders who regularly handle complex information.

As the session came to a close, the speakers each provided the following key takeaways:

Community members
are the best experts on
their own lives.

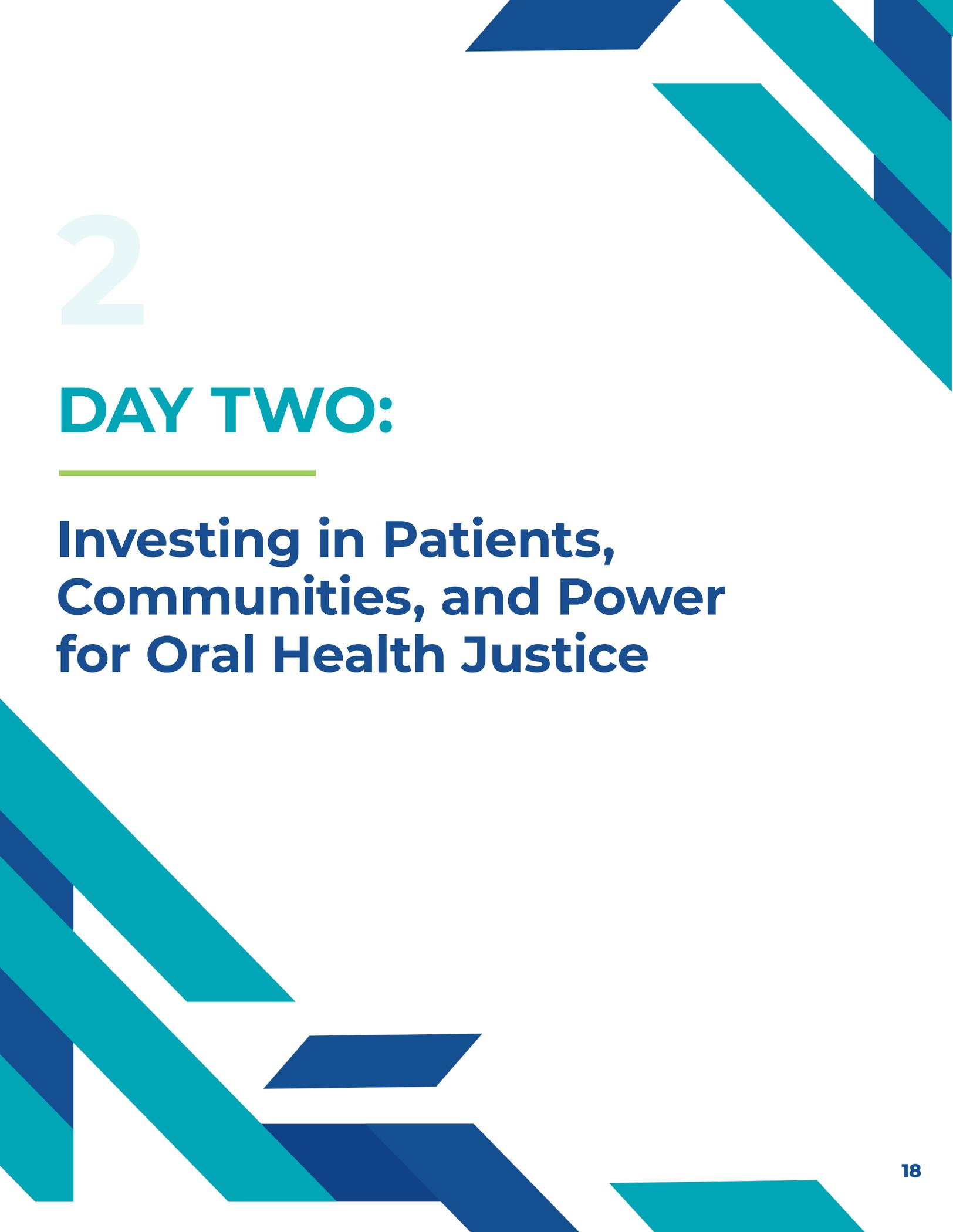
KERI EASON

Community-engaged
research provides a
vital pathway to build
trust between our
institutions and those
we hope to serve.

CODY PRICE

Communities impacted
by the work that we do
need to be given a say
and an equal voice.

**JANICE EVANS
HAWKINS**



2

DAY TWO:

Investing in Patients, Communities, and Power for Oral Health Justice

KEYNOTE SESSION: DISRUPTING THE DIVIDE AND RECLAIMING ORAL HEALTH AS A HUMAN RIGHT



DAY TWO:

KNITASHA WASHINGTON DHA, FACHE

Dr. Knitasha Washington, an acclaimed leader in healthcare quality and safety, brings a powerful perspective on integrating patient voices into transformative systems change. Drawing on her work with ATW Health Solutions and groundbreaking initiatives like CMS's Partnership for Patients and the AHRQ

Action Networks, Dr. Washington will challenge traditional notions of healthcare access and equity, emphasizing the vital role of oral health in achieving holistic health justice. This session will explore actionable strategies for embedding oral health into broader healthcare frameworks, focusing on patient safety, quality improvement, the importance of patient-centered CER in healthcare, and the amplification of community voices. Attendees will gain insights into action-able strategies for advancing patient safety, fostering community engagement, and creating sustainable systems that prioritize patient perspectives in oral healthcare. Join Dr. Washington in examining healthcare innovation with the principles of oral health justice, whole-person health, and lived experience.

Dr. Washington started day two with a moving fireside chat emphasizing patient voices, research representation, and integrated progress. Her keynote mobilized attendants towards action and encouraged the profession to think critically about how we can change deeply entrenched patient-professional paradigms. AIDPH Education and Leadership Director Elizabeth Flannery moderated.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

 **Channeling Grief into Action:** Dr. Washington began the talk with an impactful story about her father's preventable death. After being hospitalized for a mass on his kidney and experiencing declining health, the cause of her father's death was falsely listed as a heart attack rather than a pulmonary embolism, which should have triggered diagnostic protocols. Washington said the voices of the family were ignored and undervalued. Her immense loss was the impetus for founding ATW Healthcare Solutions, which strives to uplift patient and caregiver voices.

 **Informed and Patient-Driven Decisions:** Washington's personal tragedy resonated nationally and was used in one of the first large-scale, nationwide quality and safety improvement efforts, with more than 4,500 hospitals integrated. Her story exposed systemic issues within the healthcare industry. She argued that engagement needs to go beyond the point-of-care, extending into policy and community levels. She underscored the necessity of an interconnected approach between disciplines, such as incorporating dentistry in discussions surrounding chronic disease.

 **Authentic Representation:** She compelled the healthcare industry to hold itself accountable by amplifying the voices of patients themselves, particularly those from underserved communities, through measures like patient advisory councils and community involvement in research. She noted that representation is about more than filling a quota: intentional, strategic decisions are essential in ensuring that populations are accurately reflected in research, policy, and advocacy.





I don't believe that there are bad people who want to see bad outcomes. I believe there are people with limited perspectives, and we've got to go into this discussion helping to encourage and **shape a new perspective** so that we create an environment where we do see more of **humanity at the table**, talking about what should be as we move forward.



- KNITASHA WASHINGTON



Patient Self-Advocacy in Research: Washington said researchers and advocates must have a longitudinal relationship with patient communities. Providers are essential in empowering patients with the information and resources to help them learn to advocate for themselves. She encouraged transparency in how research is used and conducted, educating patients on how to get involved in research and adapting methodologies to meet the community's needs (such as providing technical assistance for older audiences when facilitating virtual participation).



Moving towards integration: Washington closed the talk by reiterating the value of interdisciplinary care and pushed attendees to take bold action in integrating oral health metrics into broader healthcare quality and safety initiatives. In particular, she recommended actively engaging with stakeholders in maternal health, chronic kidney disease, and other chronic conditions to integrate dental hygiene perspectives. She encouraged dental professionals to take the first step in reaching out.

ROUNDTABLE PRESENTATIONS PART TWO: NATIONAL CONVERSATIONS IN ADVANCING ORAL HEALTH JUSTICE THROUGH COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Oral health is deeply interconnected with overall well-being, yet significant disparities persist due to systemic, socioeconomic, and structural barriers. This session built upon day one's discussion by exploring a range of critical issues in oral healthcare, including the unique challenges faced by veterans, individuals with mental health conditions, and underserved communities. Presenters and participants emphasized the need for patient-centered research that compares different care delivery approaches and centers on the lived experiences, needs, and values of those most affected by oral health inequities.

By examining the intersection of trauma, social determinants of health, and oral health access, participants identified strategies for delivering compassionate, trauma-informed care while mitigating provider burnout. Presenters highlighted the importance of patient safety, ethical accountability, and transparency in dental practice. The integration of oral health into primary care, particularly through community-based and value-based care initiatives, was explored to improve access and outcomes for vulnerable populations. Insights from participants underscored that CER focused on trauma-informed models can provide actionable insights into which approaches best support patient safety, trust, and engagement, particularly in marginalized populations.

This session aimed to foster interdisciplinary collaboration and inspire actionable steps toward a more equitable and ethical oral healthcare system. Participants engaged in meaningful discussions on addressing disparities, strengthening community partnerships, and using engagement strategies that involve patients, caregivers, and communities as partners throughout the research and implementation process.

By prioritizing community partnerships and ensuring oral health is recognized as an integral component of comprehensive healthcare, this session advanced a shared commitment to research and practice that reflect the priorities of those most affected by health disparities. Ultimately, dental care cannot be viewed as a human right without the research, resources, and community voices providing the foundational knowledge and context for this issue.



Roundtable presentations in the Day Two session (full abstracts in Appendix One)

- » *Fighting for Veterans' Oral Health Equity* | Susan Davide, RDH, MS, MEd
- » *Serving a Hurting Community* | Jessica Elwell, Executive Director, Everyone for Veterans
- » *Addressing the Elephant in the Room: Collaborating to Ensure the Safest Dental Visit* | Steve Geiermann, DDS
- » *Social Justice and Oral Health* | Shavonne R. Healy, MSDH, RDH
- » *From Beginning to End: The Insights and Lessons Learned from a Community-Informed Health Equity Project* | Matt Vermillion, MBA
- » *Community Dental Clinics and Academic Partnerships: Lessons for Sustainability* | Tooka Zokaie, MPH, MAS, CPH

CONCLUDING SESSION: FROM VISION TO ACTION, CHARTING THE PATH TO ORAL HEALTH JUSTICE TOGETHER

In this final session, AIDPH celebrated award winners, shared our progress over the past decade, and provided colloquium outcomes and feedback in real-time with attendees. This long-standing session format allows participants to co-create the agenda, prioritize oral health topics, and generate calls to action based on colloquium content.

Pathway #1: Advancing Justice for the Next 10 Years and Beyond

As AIDPH marks its 10th anniversary, this milestone offers a moment to reflect on a decade of impact, growth, and commitment to advancing oral health justice. What began as a bold vision to center equity in dental public health has evolved into a nationally recognized organization driving change through research, education, advocacy, and community partnership. Over the past ten years, AIDPH has worked to challenge systemic inequities, uplift historically excluded communities, and reimagine dental care as a fundamental human right. As Education and Leadership Director, Elizabeth Flannery, presented during the Colloquium, some of these accomplishments include, but are not limited to:

- » Releasing more than 25 self-published and peer-reviewed manuscripts, over 100 interns and fellows, and over 50 webinars, and scientific presentations at national conferences
- » VetDentalData.org - a repository for veteran research and hub of interactive data tools for local oral health professionals to use in their work
- » Launching the AIDPH Academy, a repository of programming and CEUs following our ETCH (Education and Transformation in Community Health) model
- » Hosting five cohorts of our Federal Service Immersion (FSI) program experiential learning trip in Washington, DC, and three cohorts of our Dental Public Health Leadership Academy (DPHLA)
- » Five years of our Rural Oral Health Seminar Series
- » Performing advocacy through our Veteran Oral Health Hill Day, testimony for the Senate Health Committee, and visiting nearly half the states in the US on our Veteran Oral Health Virtual Road Tour
- » Hosting our third annual LGBTQIA+ Oral Health Week
- » Reaching thousands of industry stakeholders through our website, newsletter, and social media

Pathway #2: Co-Creating Our Collective Priorities for Patient-Centered CER and Community Engagement

WHAT IS THE IDEA INCUBATOR?

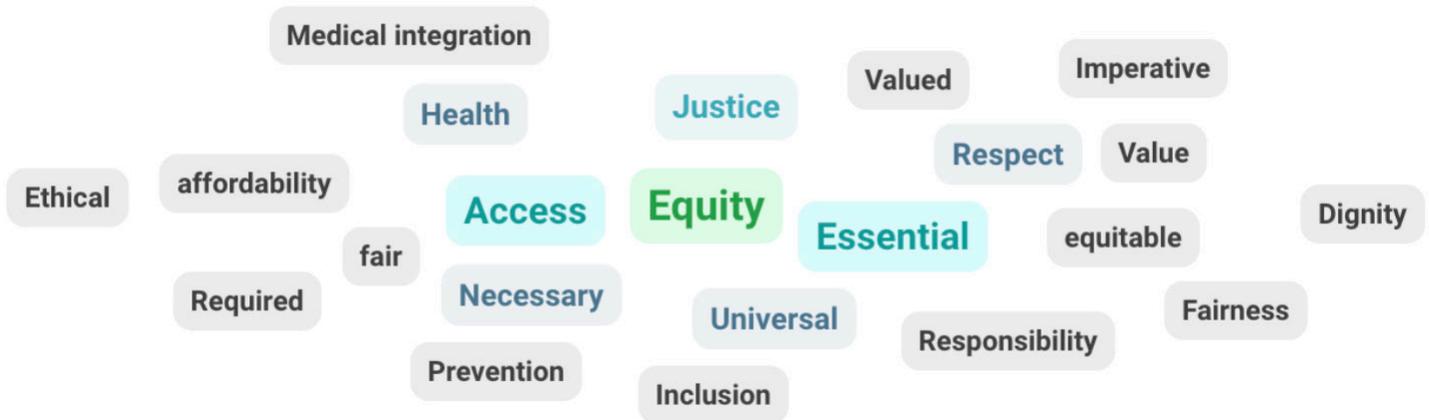
The Idea Incubator served as an interactive, real-time engagement tool used throughout the 2025 AIDPH Colloquium to crowdsource research priorities and identify actionable pathways for advancing oral health justice. Hosted via Sli.do, the tool invited participants to reflect on **two key questions**: “How can we sustain our capacity for oral health justice work?” and “What topics and questions should inform a community-engaged oral health national research agenda?” Designed to center the collective expertise and lived experience of attendees, the Idea Incubator created a dynamic space for collaborative brainstorming across research, advocacy, and practice. Insights gathered were synthesized and shared during the final session of the colloquium, anchoring the event’s closing call to action and underscoring the importance of community-driven approaches in defining future directions for oral health equity.

Participants largely expressed little community participation in patient-centered oral healthcare, describing it as lacking, challenging, of poor quality, and disconnected. Additionally, 46% of respondents ranked our current oral health system as a 2 out of 5 when incorporating community perspectives in decision-making. The audience primarily marked time and funding concerns as the most significant barriers to achieving community-engaged dental public health. (Figures One and Two on next page)



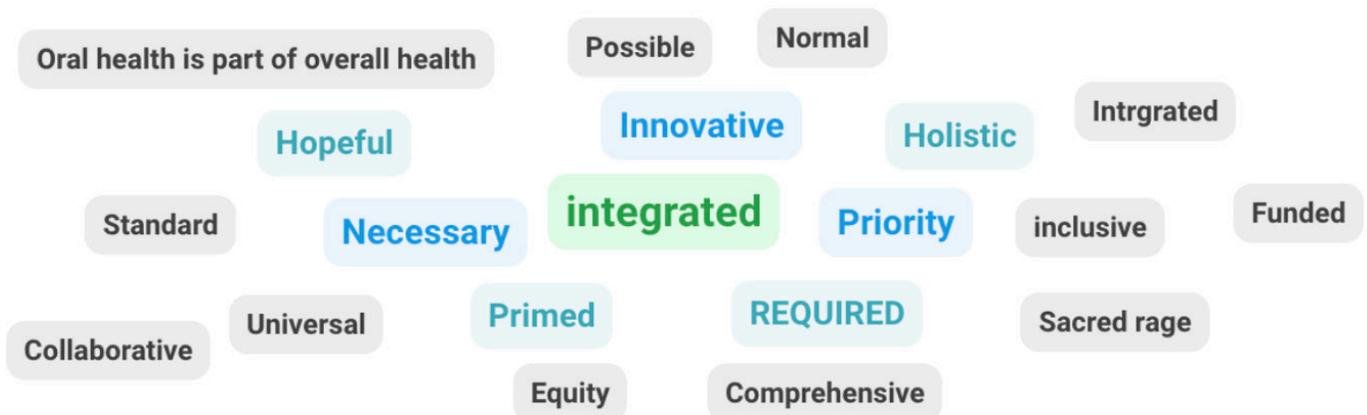
Despite the unsatisfactory state of dental public health, attendees said dental care as a human right, equity, and access were all essential, necessary, universal, and a responsibility of an ethical society.

Share one word that comes to mind when you consider dental care as a human right:

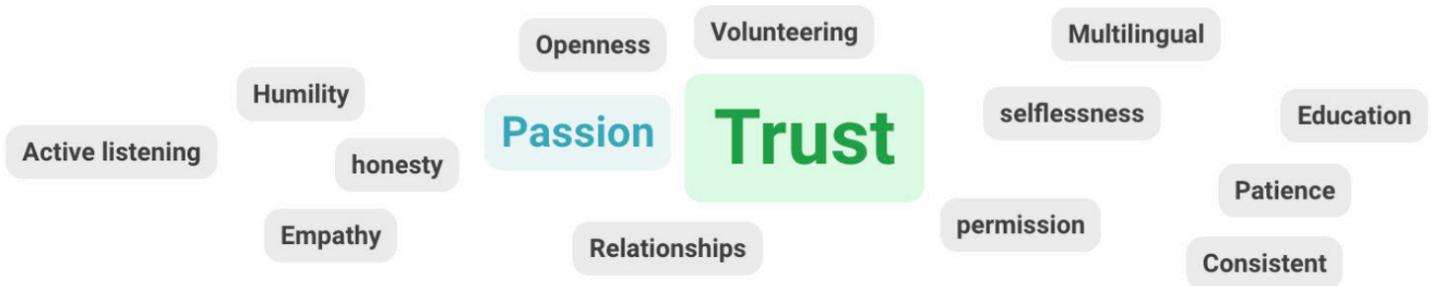


Most respondents identified legislative and policy reforms as the most effective way to build demand for dental care as a human right (44%), followed by public education and advocacy campaigns (28%). Participants envisioned a future of healthcare that is integrated, holistic, innovative, seen as a necessity, and primed to meet demands. They said trust and passion were some of the most essential aspects in enacting change.

How should we define the future of oral health within healthcare transformation?

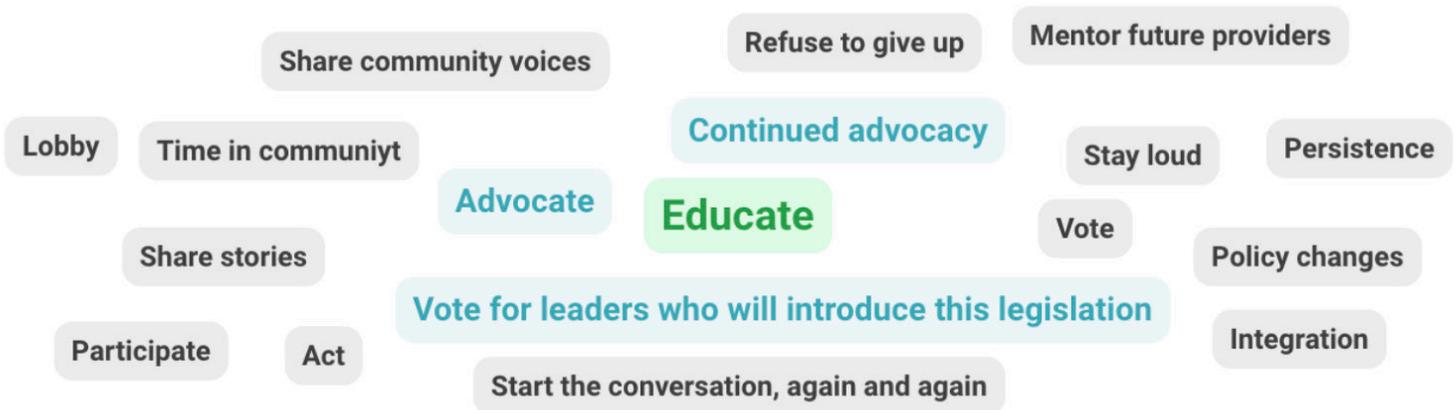


In one word, what is essential for effective community engagement?



The following steps taken by the participants included education, advocacy, and utilizing their collective voting power to uplift leaders who will introduce healthcare transformation and systemic change.

What personal or professional action can you take to advance oral health justice?



Participants offered solutions for advancing healthcare reform and patient-centered CER in real-time. These insights included:

- » Enhance **education and engagement** among decision-makers in the healthcare policy process to facilitate meaningful change.
- » Facilitate the integration of internationally trained dentists who have faced challenges obtaining their credentials in this country, thereby **addressing the workforce demand** in the dental sector.
- » Share stories and **lived experiences**. Invitations to the oral health justice conversation to include communities
- » Accept that **time is needed** for impactful change. Begin **today** for brighter tomorrows.
- » It's important to **empower communities with oral health knowledge** so that they can actively participate in decision-making regarding their treatment options. Once the public understands that there are options to conventional treatment, patients will start asking about these options, **driving changes in the oral health care system** that can benefit everyone.
- » Know that to be effective, we must **take care of ourselves** along the way. It is a marathon, not a sprint, and we must prioritize our care in order to have **lasting endurance**.
- » In this season of constant unknowns, building a network of **trusted colleagues** is more critical than ever. We're so much better **together**.



Pathway #3: Shift Structures and Systems to Recognize Dental Care as a Human Right

AIDPH Executive Director, Dr. Annaliese Cothron, ended the conference by mobilizing participants to action. She laid out the following calls to action:

1. Enact insights gained from sessions and discussions in research, advocacy, education, and clinical practice.
2. Build coalitions and collective power between communities, decision makers, healthcare professionals, and researchers.
3. Challenge the status quo and disrupt the systems that continue to exclude oral health from the broader healthcare conversation by holding decision-makers accountable and demanding that policies authentically reflect dental care and whole-person healthcare needs.

AS A PARTING QUOTE, DR. COTHRON SAID:

Where do we go from here? We take what we've learned and apply it. Your call to action is to take every discussion, every session, and every insight shared over the past two days and turn into action—whether that's in research, advocacy, education, or clinical practice. We build coalitions and collective power. We cannot transform oral healthcare alone. True change comes when communities, decision-makers, healthcare professionals, and researchers work together to drive solutions. We challenge the status quo. We are here to disrupt the systems that continue excluding oral health from the broader healthcare conversation. We hold decision-makers accountable and demand policies that embed dental care into whole-person care. This colloquium is a launchpad to turn ideas into action. AIDPH is committed to continuing this work, but we need **you**. The conversations we started here must continue in your institutions, clinics, research, and advocacy. Together, we can push the boundaries of what is possible and ensure that oral health is finally seen—and treated—as a human right. Thank you for being part of this movement. Let's get to work.

- ANNALIESE COTHRON

THE 2025 AIDPH AWARDS

The final session on day two of the Colloquium spotlighted the winners of our second annual awards, which were graciously sponsored by Delta Dental of Colorado Foundation and CareQuest Institute for Oral Health. Communications Director Christine Coffey announced the Community Champion, Equity Trailblazer Student Research, and Visionary Leadership awards, which are designed to celebrate rising and established talent making waves in dental public health.

COMMUNITY CHAMPION AWARD

The AIDPH Community Champion Award honors an individual or organization who has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to advancing oral health equity through justice-driven advocacy and community engagement. This recipient has a proven track record of promoting justice, equity, and inclusion, and has made a significant impact on improving oral health outcomes for marginalized and historically excluded communities. Their work is deeply rooted in collaboration, partnering with organizations and community stakeholders to amplify collective impact. They have engaged directly with communities to understand and respond to their unique oral health needs, and have shown a sustained, long-term dedication to creating lasting change in the pursuit of oral health justice.



WINNER

DR. APEKSHA PULGIRKAR

Dr. Apeksha Phulgirkar exemplifies a steadfast commitment to justice, equity, and inclusion in oral healthcare through initiatives addressing disparities in access for marginalized populations.

During her [New York State Dental Foundation](#) internship, Dr. Phulgirkar used ArcGIS and Tableau to analyze service gaps for vulnerable groups, including individuals with disabilities and nursing home residents. Her findings informed a mobile dental van initiative, identifying areas of need and contributing to grant proposals to secure funding for the future. She also volunteered at a mobile dental clinic in Troy, New York, assisting underserved patients after local practice closures. Dr. Phulgirkar reviewed over 600 nursing homes to evaluate in-house dental services, informing future initiatives to address care gaps. As a Lefkowitz Cohort Fellow at the [Tennessee Justice Center](#), she conducted research and provided policy recommendations to promote health equity for quality maternal healthcare in Tennessee.



EQUITY TRAILBLAZER STUDENT RESEARCH

The Equity Trailblazer Student Research Award recognizes students whose research has meaningfully advanced justice, equity, and inclusion in oral healthcare. This awardee has led or contributed to innovative research initiatives that address oral health disparities and challenge systemic barriers to care. Their work reflects a strong commitment to engaging with the communities most affected by these disparities, ensuring that research is informed by lived experience and grounded in community realities. Through collaboration with peers, faculty, and community organizations, they have helped shape projects that promote equity at every stage. In addition to their research contributions, the recipient has demonstrated strong leadership qualities and a clear potential to drive future progress in oral health equity.



WINNER

MS. TOOKA ZOKAIE, MPH, MAS, CPH

Tooka Zokaie is the daughter of Iranian refugees who were denied dental care for many of their early years in America. She originally planned to become a dentist until she volunteered at a Give Kids a Smile event and

saw how many individuals came to the dental office with dental needs neglected by society. She did not want to work in a system that denied some people care and gave others access, and she wanted to transform the system. Often the youngest or only woman of color in the room, Ms. Zokaie continued to speak up to make oral health more inclusive for both dental professionals and public health and policy. Her professional experiences as a woman and racial minority have shaped her research approach to be more diverse by using any platform she has to center historically excluded experiences.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: GUILLERMO ENRIQUE TAMAYO CABEZA, FATEMEH POUR, AND KRISHA SHAH

Guillermo Enrique Tamayo Cabeza is a research assistant at [Indiana University School of Dentistry](#) whose research efforts promote equity in oral health, particularly for the LGBTQ+ community, involving peers, faculty, and community organizations.

Fatemah Pour is a dental assistant in Texas whose work with the Sexual & Gender Minority Scientific Interest Group at [NIH](#) was instrumental in accurately categorizing the diverse spectrum of the SGM population. Krisha Shah is a Dental Public Health Resident at the [University of Rochester](#) whose research centers on the intersection of mental health and oral health disparities.



VISIONARY LEADERSHIP AWARD

The Visionary Leadership Award honors an individual whose bold leadership has shaped the future of oral health through a deep and enduring commitment to justice, equity, and inclusion. This awardee has a proven record of driving innovative programs, policies, or practices that directly address oral health disparities and challenge systemic inequities. Their leadership is distinguished by a collaborative approach—working alongside diverse stakeholders to expand impact and catalyze meaningful, lasting change. Through their contributions to oral health research, policy, access, or care delivery, they have made a tangible and far-reaching difference in advancing a more just and equitable oral health system.



WINNER

DR. ARLET ARRATOONIAN

In 2012, Dr. Arlet Arratoonian transitioned from her career as a dental CEO to pursue her passions for community and public health dentistry, guided by her lived experience as a member of an immigrant family dealing with food

insecurity and health access challenges. As a Dental Director at [Family Health Care Centers of Greater Los Angeles](#) (FHCCGLA), she has played a critical role in integrating inclusive dental services for LGBTQ+ individuals and immunocompromised individuals/HIV patients. She has been at the forefront of advocating for comprehensive screenings for social determinants of health, particularly food insecurity. Beyond direct patient care, Dr. Arratoonian actively advocates for systemic change in oral healthcare. As a [NNOHA Advocacy & Policy Committee](#) member, she has worked to expand dental therapy, increase funding for community health centers, and improve access for veterans and LGBTQ+ populations.

HONORABLE MENTION: DOUGLAS W. CROSS

Dr. Douglas W. Cross is the Dental Director at [EXCELth, Inc.](#) and the site director for the [NYU Langone Advanced Education in General Dentistry \(AEGD\) Residency Program](#). Since graduating from dental school, Dr. Cross has dedicated his professional career to serving marginalized populations.





L-R: Dr. Apeksha Phulgirkar, Tooka Zokaie, Dr. Arlet Aratoonian, and AIDPH Executive Director and co-founder Dr. Annaliese Cothron

AWARDS RECEPTION

AIDPH's 2025 Colloquium awardees and nominees were honored at an in-person awards ceremony at the Hyatt House in Orlando, Florida, during the 2025 National Oral Health Conference.

The reception occurred in concert with the 2025 National Oral Health Conference (NOHC), where AIDPH presented roundtables on topics including predoctoral workforce strategies, collaborative power in research, impact through effective communications, and LGBTQIA+ oral health, along with a mainstage session on state-based [Medicaid advocacy](#).



EVENT OUTCOMES & FEEDBACK

AIDPH appreciates the insights and feedback from Colloquium participants and our broader community. Event evaluations suggested participants generally valued the convenience and flexibility of the virtual format, enjoyed engaging, informative content, and felt compelled by AIDPH's mission and values. We're grateful to be a source of information and inspiration, and hope to see many familiar faces next year.

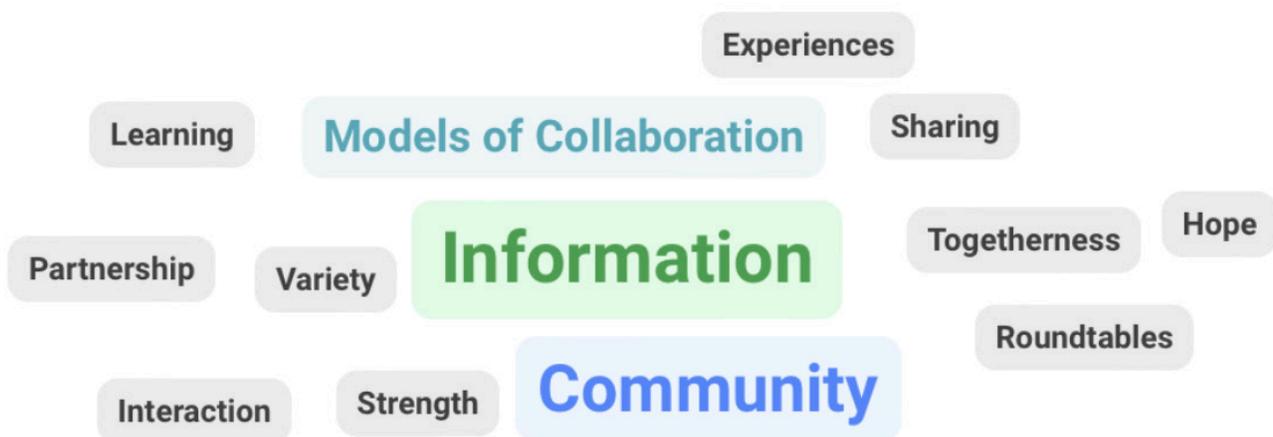
"The sessions were well planned and encouraged engagement by attendees."

"The real-time sli.do questions helped me feel connected to other attendees and see where they were."

"I especially enjoyed the 'From Vision to Action' Discussion Panel on Day 1, the Roundtable led by Dr. Janice Hawkins, and the Keynote presentation by Dr. Knitasha Washington."

"I will take advantage of AIDPH resources to better contribute to the overall mission."

Participants summarized their favorite parts of the Colloquium in the word cloud below as the final session ended.



Participants were asked to define their personal next steps in advancing dental care as a human right based on what they gained through colloquium content. Personal calls to action included:

- » I will continue to work with our team to achieve engagement with the people we serve. Only when their voices are truly heard will we be able to advance our agenda of oral health equity. In parallel,
- » I will strive to empower our communities with oral health knowledge so they can make informed decisions regarding their health.
- » As a member of organized dentistry, it's hard to fight for equity- at times it feels like a job with no promised positive outcome. However, I could never forget my personal life experiences as someone that comes from a vulnerable community and so I will be loud, clear and persistent.
- » I won't give up and my next steps are going to be to focus on what my capacity is to help right now.
- » I want to ensure that I don't get burned out and that I fully commit to whatever I work on.
- » I will learn more, gain more knowledge, join more collaboratives like this so that I can take that knowledge and be committed to propel action.

Lastly, we asked participants what they wanted to see in future colloquia. Ideas included addressing funding and workforce shortages, grassroots advocacy, improving medical-dental integration through technology, and community oral health education and outreach methods. Community-based topics such as special needs and oral health, senior/elder dental care, early childhood and parent dental education, and other population-specific themes.

As AIDPH closes the book on our 2025 Colloquium we look ahead to 2026 and feel gratitude for the community connection we have cultivated over the past decade. Thank you for supporting us now and in the future.

APPENDIX ONE: ROUNDTABLE ABSTRACTS

A-1 Keynote Sessions: Speakers engaged in “fireside chats” designed to provide a platform for their expertise while inviting audience participation through virtual discussion and Q&A forums.

TITLE: Disrupting the Divide: Reclaiming Oral Health as a Human Right

SPEAKER(S): Heaton, Brenda, PhD, MPH

ABSTRACT: In this keynote session, Dr. Brenda Heaton challenges the deeply ingrained perception of oral health as a status symbol, exposing the stark inequities that have made a healthy smile a luxury for some and an unattainable dream for others. Drawing on her career as an oral epidemiologist and her groundbreaking community-based research, Dr. Heaton will illuminate the systemic barriers—historical, political, and social—that have kept dentistry siloed from general medicine. Through compelling stories and data, she will uncover how these inequities manifest across the lifespan, from the preventable pain of early childhood caries to the devastating impacts of tooth loss in adulthood. This keynote will invite attendees to reimagine oral health as a human right and a vital component of quality of life, health equity, and longevity. This session will outline a bold vision for dismantling privilege-driven systems and forging a future where oral and systemic health unite under one roof—in practice and principle.

TITLE: Redefining Healthcare Justice Through Patient-Centered Progress

SPEAKER(S): Washington, Knitasha, DHA FACHE

ABSTRACT: Dr. Knitasha Washington, an acclaimed healthcare quality and safety leader, brings a powerful perspective on integrating patient voices into transformative systems change. Drawing on her work with ATW Health Solutions and groundbreaking initiatives like CMS's Partnership for Patients and the AHRQ Action Networks, Dr. Washington will challenge traditional notions of healthcare access and equity, emphasizing the vital role of oral health in achieving holistic health justice. This session will explore actionable strategies for embedding oral health into broader healthcare frameworks, focusing on patient safety, quality improvement, and amplifying community voices. Attendees will gain insights into actionable strategies for advancing patient safety, fostering community engagement, and creating sustainable systems prioritizing equity and inclusion in oral healthcare. Join Dr. Washington in examining healthcare innovation with the principles of oral health justice, whole-person health, and lived experience.

A-2 Workshop Sessions: These sessions brought AIDPH staff and experts together to engage in live dialogue about overarching Colloquium themes.

TITLE: From Vision to Action: Building a Community-Driven Agenda for Oral Health Justice

SPEAKER(S): Cothron, Annaliese, DHSc, MS, CPH; Eason, Keri, MA, PhD; Hawkins, Janice Evans, PhD, RN

ABSTRACT: N; Price, Cody, MPH

Abstract: This panel discussion with the AIDPH Oral Health Community Advisory Board and Oral Health Community Engagement Task Force empowers attendees to apply oral health advocacy and research through a community-centered lens. Grounded in insights from a consensus-driven advocacy and participatory research agenda, this session will explore actionable strategies for dismantling systemic inequities and amplifying historically excluded voices in oral health. Participants will explore integrating lived experiences, social determinants, and cultural contexts into a community-driven agenda prioritizing health equity and justice. This session will provide you with the tools, knowledge, and inspiration to build actionable pathways toward an oral health system that reflects values of inclusion, empowerment, and justice.

TITLE: Charting the Path to Oral Health Justice Together

SPEAKER(S): Cothron, Annaliese, DHSc, MS, CPH; Coffey, Christine, BA, MS; Eason, Keri, PhD, MA; Flannery, Elizabeth, MPH

ABSTRACT: As the colloquium draws to a close, this interactive workshop invites attendees to transform knowledge into action. Guided by AIDPH's mission, vision, and values, we'll collectively apply the insights gained throughout the event to develop tangible strategies for advancing oral health justice in our communities. Participants will collaborate in real time to identify actionable next steps that prioritize equity, community empowerment, and systemic change. AIDPH will challenge attendees to reflect on their role in reshaping oral healthcare, centering the voices of underserved and historically excluded populations, and fostering a justice-oriented oral health system.

A-2 Roundtable Sessions: Presenters created discussion-based content for the roundtables to engage participants in exchanging ideas and collaborative dialogue.

TITLE: The Potential of Value-Based Oral Healthcare in Transforming Oral Health Outcomes

AUTHOR(S): Attansi, Kim, PhD, BCMAS, RDH, FADHA; Bradshaw, David, PhD; Mangal, Munisha, MSc, Harvard lead. Prog., BDS

ABSTRACT: Traditional dental care models focus on volume rather than value, leading to inefficiencies and varied patient outcomes. Value-based oral healthcare (VBOHC) is an emerging paradigm that aims to improve patient outcomes while reducing healthcare costs. This model emphasizes patient-centered care, outcome measurement, and integrated care delivery. Despite its growing adoption in various healthcare sectors, its application in oral healthcare remains underexplored.

TITLE: Unmasking Structural Racism in Dental Public Health: Methodological Gaps, Approaches, and Lessons from the HRS

AUTHOR(S): Balasundaram, Rohit Baal, MPH, PhD(c)

ABSTRACT: We investigate methodological challenges and gaps in dental public health (DPH) research related to race, where the growing evidence of structural racism's impact on oral health outcomes is sometimes masked by measurement errors, unmeasured confounding, selection biases, and debates on how to handle race. Is it an effect modifier or a confounder? Should it be adjusted for the model? First, we outline these gaps, drawing from recent evidence, and discuss implications for future research. Second, we provide recommended steps for handling races, third, we broadly investigate modern epidemiology methods such as sensitivity analyses, causal inference, and AI/ML approaches. These rigorous strategies strengthen inferences and ensure that findings can inform equitable public health policies. To motivate our discussion, we highlight research from the Health and Retirement Study, examining the relationship between perceived discrimination and dental utilization among older adults. This example highlights practical challenges and potential solutions in applying modern epidemiologic methods. Finally, we invite participants to share experiences and foster collaborative solutions to address these hurdles, fostering robust, inclusive research. By refining methodological approaches and integrating advanced analytic techniques, DPH can better reveal the complex role of structural racism and oral health outcomes for equitable oral health interventions.

TITLE: Fighting for Veterans' Oral Health Equity

AUTHOR(S): Davide, Susan, RHD, MS, MEd.; Monchik, Catherine, RDH, MS

ABSTRACT: A first-time Veterans Day event was held at an urban dental hygiene program care clinic to provide and promote awareness of health inequities and the oral needs of veterans. Veterans often have medical, physical, psychological, or other social disabilities that require modified procedures to provide dental hygiene treatment. This oral health event aimed to initiate a day dedicated and inclusive to veterans and to establish an association between community, dental hygiene, and other allied health and sciences students in educating and providing patient care to this population. This roundtable discussion will present the challenges and barriers faced throughout the process and current preparation efforts to successfully provide access and linkage to oral health prevention and care for veterans. Participants are encouraged to share their previous experiences, approaches, and insights into similar events. We will share our plans for implementing the ADA Foundation's Give Veterans A Smile Program Planning and Promotion Guide, and participants are invited to provide their thoughts and suggestions. We will discuss interprofessional and collaborative partnerships with allied health programs and community activism. Continued efforts to raise awareness of the oral health needs of veterans are essential, along with faculty, college, and community collaborative efforts to support and sustain a commitment to provide continuous equity and access to oral health care for veterans.

TITLE: Serving a Hurting Community

AUTHOR(S): Elwell, Jessica

ABSTRACT: Veterans face unique challenges shaped by their military service, with many experiencing the lasting impacts of PTSD, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), and generational or systemic poverty. These experiences can create barriers to accessing essential services, including oral health care, which is often overlooked but vital for overall well-being. In this roundtable session, we will explore the lived experiences of our nation's veterans and unpack the systemic and personal challenges they face in achieving equitable access to oral health support. Participants will gain insight into how trauma and socioeconomic factors intersect to affect oral health outcomes and discuss strategies to address these disparities effectively. The session will also address the emotional toll of serving this vulnerable population, offering tools and techniques to prevent compassion fatigue among providers. By fostering a culture of empathy and resilience, we can better meet the needs of veterans while maintaining our well-being. This collaborative discussion aims to inspire and equip attendees with practical approaches for delivering compassionate care, building trust, and becoming more vigorous advocates for veterans. Together, we can make meaningful progress in serving a hurting community with dignity and respect.

TITLE: Addressing the Elephant in the Room: Collaborating to Ensure the Safest Dental Visit

AUTHOR(S): Geiermann, Steve, DDS

ABSTRACT: Few challenges strike as much fear in a dentist's heart as the need to talk to a patient harmed by their dental care. It is equally challenging to share such information with professional colleagues. By and large, the practice of dentistry is safe, but there is always room to improve. Medicine has struggled with enhancing its own culture of safety for decades; dentistry has no such culture of accountability, except at the most serious level. Many adverse events are shelved or dealt with below the radar. State dental boards may not be required to make their actions public.

TITLE: Promoting Sustainable Practices in Oral Healthcare: A Roundtable Discussion

AUTHOR(S): Hawkins, Janice Evans, PhD, RN, CNS, FAAN

ABSTRACT: Climate change poses a serious threat to our health. In fact, the World Health Organization named climate change the "single biggest health threat" to humanity and predicts an increase of 250,000 deaths annually from climate-related causes. Ironically, the healthcare industry, including oral healthcare, is responsible for over 8% of carbon emissions in the US and more than 4% globally. With the climate-related health impacts predicted to increase annually, healthcare providers are obliged to take action. One strategy to mitigate climate change is to reduce our carbon footprint. The purpose of this roundtable discussion is to share ideas for more sustainable practices in oral healthcare. Promoting greener dental practices will contribute to lowering carbon emissions and improving overall health outcomes. As healthcare workers, we can positively impact climate change by doing our part every day to minimize the carbon footprint of healthcare systems.

TITLE: Social Justice and Oral Health

AUTHOR(S): Healy, Shavonne R., MSDH, RDH

ABSTRACT: This roundtable discussion will focus on the intersection of social justice and oral health, exploring systemic barriers that perpetuate inequities in dental care. Participants will examine how socioeconomic, racial, and geographic disparities contribute to poor oral health outcomes, with a particular focus on underserved communities. The discussion will highlight the critical role of preventive care in reducing the oral disease burden and advancing health equity.

TITLE: Dental Therapists: Increasing Access, Expanding the Dental Team, and Promoting Economic Development

AUTHOR(S): Lopez, Esther DDS, MPH; Tomar, Scott L., DMD, MPH, DrPH; Brannon, Lauren (Hale)

ABSTRACT: Dental therapists have been working in the U.S. for two decades, and the number of states that allow their practice continues to grow. This presentation will examine the current status of dental therapists in the U.S., what the major drivers of the dental therapy movement have been, the impact dental therapists have had, and how they will interface with the broader shifts affecting oral health. The Illinois DT bill will also be discussed.

TITLE: Bridging the Gap: The Intersection of Diabetes and Oral Health in Public Health Practice

AUTHOR(S): Tiwana, Mannat, BDS/MPH(c)

ABSTRACT: Diabetes and oral health are deeply interconnected, yet this relationship remains under-recognized in public health initiatives. Individuals with diabetes are at a higher risk for periodontal disease, which, in turn, can exacerbate glycemic control challenges. Despite this bidirectional link, oral health is often overlooked in diabetes management strategies, creating a critical gap in comprehensive care. This presentation explores the intersection of diabetes and oral health, emphasizing the importance of integrating oral health screenings and preventive care into diabetes management. We will highlight disparities in access to dental care among underserved populations, where both diabetes prevalence and oral health inequities are disproportionately high. Using a public health lens, we will discuss strategies for bridging these gaps through policy initiatives, interdisciplinary collaboration, and community-based interventions. By fostering awareness and advocating for holistic care models, we can enhance health outcomes for individuals with diabetes while advancing equity in oral healthcare. This discussion aims to inspire actionable steps for integrating oral health into broader public health frameworks, ensuring that dental care is no longer an afterthought in diabetes prevention and management.

TITLE: From Beginning to End: The Insights and Lessons Learned of a Community-Informed Health Equity Project

AUTHOR(S): Vermillion, Matt, MBA; Leung, Wai-Sum, RDH, MS

ABSTRACT: Access to dental or medical care can be challenging, especially if you are impacted by social drivers of health (i.e., housing, transportation, income, education, etc.). MORE Care® Ohio is aiming to improve access challenges for children living in rural Ohio by integrating oral health into primary care practices. This program is a collaboration between CareQuest Institute for Oral Health and Oral Health Ohio (OHO), which helps primary care practices build patient-centered referral networks with local dental providers to improve oral health and overall health within communities. From 2020 to 2022, OHO used design thinking to engage the community, build consensus, and define actionable goals for advancing oral health equity through value-based care (VBC) and medical-dental integration. The results were a 24-month pilot (2022-2024) to test medical-dental integration, coordinated care, and value-based payment in Ohio. This session will highlight the insights and lessons learned from the beginning to the end of this community-informed health equity project that served over 19,000 underserved children in Ohio.

TITLE: Learning Together: Enhancing Dental Quality of Life for People with Mental Health Conditions

AUTHOR(S): Zechner, Michelle, PhD, MSW, LSW, CPRP; Kasper, Ann, MA, CPSS; York, Jill, DDS, MAS, FICD, FACD

ABSTRACT: An interdisciplinary professional panel will explore oral health quality of life among people with mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression. The session combines presentations, storytelling, and interactive discussions to engage the audience and foster meaningful dialogue about improving oral health for people with mental health conditions. The panels: — 1) A mental health faculty discussing a federally funded grant exploring oral health experiences for individuals with severe mental illness, sharing survey findings on oral health-related quality of life, and outlining next steps for stakeholder-informed guidelines and training. 2) A mental health advocate and academic research advisor sharing lived system experience highlighting barriers to dental care for people with mental health conditions and strategies to promote voice, choice, and empowerment in improving oral health treatment experiences for all involved. 3) A faculty dentist highlighting dentists' role in improving oral health and quality of life for people with mental illness, offering insights on trauma-informed care, and recommendations for education and practice.

TITLE: Community Dental Clinics and Academic Partnerships: Lessons for Sustainability

AUTHOR(S): Zokaie, Tooka, MPH, MAS, CPH; Clyburn, Barbara, DMD, MPH-D

ABSTRACT: In the final year of dental school, dental students complete clinical hours that can take place in community dental clinics if the dental school has a partnership rotation program. As part of the California State Community-Based Clinical Education grant, an exploratory qualitative interview project with Federally Qualified Health Center clinic directors was conducted to learn the factors that lead to successful and sustainable partnerships between dental schools and community clinics. Four interviews were conducted, and two analysts coded transcripts in MaxQDA. Results showed two areas of high connection: 1) between real-life experience for students and respect for community clinics, and 2) between scheduling of students and student experience in clinics. Clinics that value students having real-life experiences, rather than financial gain for themselves, spoke to the importance of building respect for community clinics. In addition, clinics that kept their schedule open for students were focused on students gaining experience in clinics rather than maximizing their own output, with students adding patients to the schedule. This roundtable will explore the four areas of successful partnerships that differ from discontinued partnerships: 1) chair space, 2) program champions, 3) clinic locations, and 4) public health value.



APPENDIX TWO: SPEAKER BIOSKETCHES



BRENDA HEATON, PhD, MPH (she/her)

Dr. Brenda Heaton is the Associate Dean for Research and an Associate Professor of Epidemiology and Health Services Research at the University of Utah School of Dentistry. She is also an adjunct associate professor of population health sciences at the Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine. Heaton is an epidemiologist whose primary research interests include focusing on the social production of oral health, with an overall goal of addressing the complex mechanisms responsible for the emergence of oral health disparities. She also maintains significant scholarship in periodontal disease epidemiology, with interest in the relationship between periodontitis and other chronic inflammatory diseases, periodontitis and reproductive outcomes, and the validity of clinical and self-report measures for population-level research. Her research is funded by multiple awards from the National Institute for Dental and Craniofacial Research. She is an active member of the American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research, having most recently served as an elected member of the Board of Directors (2019-2022). Heaton received a PhD and MPH in epidemiology from Boston University School of Public Health.



KNITASHA WASHINGTON, DHA, FACHE (she/her)

Dr. Knitasha Washington is a visionary force in healthcare transformation, internationally recognized for her pioneering work in advancing health equity, people-centered care, and systemic performance improvement. As the Founder, President, and CEO of ATW Health Solutions (ATW), Dr. Washington has catalyzed groundbreaking advancements in healthcare quality, safety, and equity. Her leadership at ATW has been instrumental in saving an estimated 87,000 lives, preventing 2.1 million instances of patient harm, and delivering \$19.8 billion in healthcare cost savings through landmark initiatives like the CMS Partnership for Patients Campaign. With over two decades of expertise, she has become a central figure in healthcare, driving innovation in system performance, operational excellence, and patient safety, with a focus on addressing the needs of underserved populations. Inspired by personal tragedy—the preventable loss of her father in 2009—she channeled her grief into action, becoming a powerful advocate for harm reduction and healthcare equity.



ANNALIESE COTHRON, DHSC, MS, CPH (she/her)

Co-Founder & Executive Director, AIDPH

Dr. Annaliese Cothron (she/her) is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of the American Institute of Dental Public Health, a 501(c)3 nonprofit that empowers communities to advance oral health through research, education, and advocacy. She received her Doctor of Health Sciences (DHSc) from A.T. Still University in Leadership and Organizational Behavior and Master of Science from Mississippi State University, specializing in Experimental Psychology with a theme in Applied Statistics. Dr. Cothron is credentialed as Certified in Public Health and has a certificate in nonprofit management and fundraising from Our Lady of the Lake University. She is also a fellow of the UT Health Communications Leadership Institute and the ADEA Emerging Leaders Institute. Dr. Cothron currently serves as a board member for Equality Texas and the iFLOSS Illinois Oral Health Coalition while supporting the Oral Health Progress and Equity Network as national advocacy committee lead. She is an active participant in local, state, and national professional associations, including the American Public Health Association and the American Association of Dental Public Health. Dr. Cothron began her career in dental public health as a Biostatistician at the UT Health San Antonio Dental School, where the bulk of her work focused on statewide data surveillance, evaluating outcomes for children's dental sealant programs, and pursuing federally grant-funded initiatives. After founding AIDPH, Dr. Cothron has focused on advancing oral health equity for AIDPH's primary communities of focus: veterans, queer people, rural communities, and people with disabilities. When she isn't working, Annaliese enjoys reading and learning to crochet while spending time with her family and friends.



ELIZABETH FLANNERY, MPH (she/her)

Elizabeth Flannery is a dedicated public health champion with expertise in developing and implementing nonprofit programs. She is deeply committed to promoting health equity, advocating for access to care, and addressing health disparities. Elizabeth holds a Master of Public Health from George Washington University. She also earned a Certificate in Nonprofit Management from the University of Washington, and prior to that, she completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication and Advertising from Marist College.

Currently, Elizabeth serves as the Director of Education and Leadership at the American Institute of Dental Public Health. In this role, she oversees the AIDPH Academy portfolio, designing and implementing programming and executing advocacy action plans. She actively contributes to advancing equity and access to oral healthcare through advocacy and program implementation.



KERI EASON, MA, PHD (she/her)

Dr. Keri Eason is the Director of Research and Impact for AIDPH where she manages the organization's research portfolio. Dr. Eason has worked in research for over seven years. Throughout this time, she has worked in higher education and nonprofit settings, specializing in quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and design. She is committed to working with and leveraging data with the ever-present goal of creating positive and sustainable change for marginalized communities. Dr. Eason holds a Master of Arts in English from Northern Kentucky University and a Master of Arts and PhD in Sociology from the University of Cincinnati. She has several publications on the recruitment and retention of marginalized students in Health Care and Engineering Education. In her spare time, she enjoys herding her three cats and rooting for the Cleveland CAVS.



CHRISTINE COFFEY, MS (she/her)

Christine is a seasoned strategic communications professional with extensive experience in strategic communication planning, public and media relations, crisis communication, advancement and development communication, event coordination, social media marketing, fundraising, and employee communication. She has devoted her career to working for mission-based organizations that align with her personal values, including social justice agencies, health care, and higher education organizations. She holds an MS in journalism from Boston University's College of Communication, where she is an adjunct lecturer. In her free time, she volunteers at a local food pantry and cherishes time with her husband, son, and poorly behaved Australian Shepherd.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Book of Proceedings was developed by the AIDPH Staff including:

Christine Coffey, Director of Communications; Elizabeth Couture, Graphic Designer; Annaliese Cothron, Executive Director; Elizabeth Flannery, Director of Education and Leadership; & Thomas Maye.



SPECIAL THANKS to our student aides, Rohit Baal Balasundaram and Saana Kataria, for their note-taking and administrative assistance.

This conference was supported in through a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute Engagement Award (29031).

Suggested citation: Dental Care as a Human Right: Advancing Oral Health Justice Through Community Empowerment. Conference Proceedings for the 2025 AIDPH Annual Colloquium. March 2025, Chicago IL. <https://doi.org/10.58677/WFYM8363>



Dental Care is a human right



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