
Legislative Issues

2005



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Dentistry is constantly changing. Legislation, regulation, and other public policy initiatives play an important role in shaping the course and the future of dentistry. The American Dental Association is in Washington, D. C. to promote the public's oral health and the interests of dental students and dentists. The Department of State Government Affairs, located at ADA's Chicago Headquarters, assists state and local dental societies with state legislation and regulations.

As long as the ADA represents an overwhelming majority of the dental professionals in this country, it will continue to be an important presence in Washington, speaking directly to leaders who are shaping legislative issues. Make sure your voice is heard; keep up-to-date with these issues. With your help, the ADA can help protect the future of dentistry. For more information about current ADA initiatives, visit www.ada.org/goto/advocacy.

Legislative Issues

There are a number of issues that are of particular importance to dental students and new dentists, including student loan interest deductions, student loan consolidation, funding for dental research and education, and patient protections. Many of these issues affect dental students and dentists, e.g., licensure qualifications, acceptance of state and regional clinical licensure examinations, and delegation of functions to dental auxiliaries are decided by state legislators and regulators.

The ADA lobbies Congress, the White House, and federal agencies on a variety of issues. The ADA also assists constituent societies in their lobbying efforts at the state level. Here are just a few of the major issues the ADA is advocating on behalf of dentists.

Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act

Student Loan Consolidation and the complexities associated with it have always been a problem for dental students and new dentists. That is why the ADA has been working with a coalition of organizations to change the law to make it easier for students or former students to consolidate their loans. The ADA urges Congress to include in either the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act or in stand-alone legislation debt relief proposals to:

> **Repeal the "Single-Holder" rule.**

This would allow loan consolidation with any lender on the market, not just the borrower's current lender.

> **Allow refinancing of consolidated loans at lower interest rates.**

Currently, once student loans are consolidated, the borrower is not allowed to refinance — even if the student loan rates drop.

> **Permit fixed rates for consolidated loans.**

This would allow borrowers to avoid escalating interest rates and uncertainty in payments.

> **Preserve the loan consolidation system.**

The loan consolidation program is a good public policy and should otherwise remain part of the Higher Education Act.

Student Loan Interest Deduction

Increasing dental school student loan debt, coupled with the rising costs of establishing a dental practice, leaves new dentists deeply in debt even before they begin practicing. Expanding the income ceilings and enhancing the deduction amount would provide relief for dentists who wish to pursue careers in the public health service or military or establish a practice in an underserved area. The ADA has been successful in changing tax law twice so lobbied Congress to successfully expand the student loan interest deduction by:

- Eliminating the five-year cap
- Expanding the income ceilings to \$65,000 for single filers and \$130,000 for joint filers; and
- Raising the deduction to \$2,500

Amalgam

In Washington, D.C. and in state legislatures across the country, anti-amalgamists are working to ban or limit the use of amalgam by imposing strict requirements on dental offices — often requiring that water be cleaner when leaving the dentist's office than it was when it came in! The ADA is using sound science to fight these efforts, and with the strength of our membership behind us, has been successful in keeping the choice of restorative materials between you and your patients — we've had over 30 recent victories in courts around the country, where we were able to have suits challenging amalgam dismissed.

Military Issues

The ADA is currently working with representatives to urge Congress to provide adequate support for federal dentists and oral health programs by:

- Providing dental insurance for federal employees. This allows federal employees, retirees and their dependents to buy into self-funded dental plans under the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan;
- Providing additional funding for the Health Professions Scholarship Program (HPSP) and the Health Professions Loan Repayment Program (HPLRP) for both active duty and reserve components;
- Exempting federal income taxes for scholarships awarded through the Health Professions Scholarships and National Health Service Corps;
- Supporting funding for military dental research;
- Improving responsibility pay and comparability pay programs for Veterans Administration dentists. The ADA was a leading force in the passage of H.R. 2660, "Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is-The VA Dentists Equity Act";
- Providing additional funding for Indian Health Service dental programs;
- Supporting additional funding for General Practice and Dental Public Health Residency programs and National Health Service Corps scholarships for dentists.

Other recent ADA successes include blocking OSHA from imposing regulations that could have cost dentists thousand of dollars. And the ADA class action lawsuits against insurance companies to protect the dentist-patient relationship and remedy insurance abuses continue. One lawsuit has already been settled in our favor. Our current priorities in Washington D.C. include funding non-hospital-based GME programs and revision of student loan consolidated loan at lower interest rates, and permit fixed rates for consolidated loans.

ADA Grassroots Action Team

With the support of member dental students and dentists and the leadership of experienced dental professionals, the ADA is continually expanding its reach and influence. Nearly 13,500 dentists across the country have formed a grassroots network to focus on important legislative and regulatory issues to the profession. To find out more about the Grassroots Action Team, call the answerline at 1-888-ADA TEAM (232-8326), or visit ADA www.ada.org.

American Dental Political Action Committee (ADPAC)

Another important ADA legislative agency is the American Dental Political Action Committee (ADPAC). ADPAC is the political arm of the American Dental Association. It was founded in 1969 to complement the ADA's legislative advocacy efforts. Its mission is to educate dentists about the importance of political action and to help elect candidates for congressional office who understand and are supportive of issues of importance to dentists and their patients. ADPAC provides financial assistance on a bipartisan basis to congressional candidates, oversees a grassroots network of activist dentists, provides political education opportunities for member dentists, works closely with state dental political action committees, and encourages dentists to participate in an array of political campaigns and activities.

While not a lobbying organization, through its focus on political action and involvement, ADPAC complements the legislative efforts of the ADA on the national level and coordinates its activities with the ADA Council on Governmental Affairs and the ADA Leadership. More detailed information about ADPAC is included in this InfoPak — see *Frequently-Asked Questions About ADPAC*.

Publications

The ADA also publishes newsletters to help keep its leaders and grassroots members up-to-date with the issues in Washington and state legislatures. The *Dental Advocate* is a monthly publication for the Grassroots Action Team Members and the *State Legislative Report* is a monthly publication for dental leaders addressing the issues at the state level. These publications are available for any ADA member to view at www.ada.org/goto/advocacy.

Pizza & Politics

The ADA offers a free lunch-and-learn for dental students about how politics affects dentistry! You'll learn about:

- Why political action is important to dental students and practicing dentists
- How government impacts dental practice
- How to be an advocate for your patients, your practice and your community
- How to ask questions on Licensure, reciprocity, managed care and more!

The program is available to any dental school or ASDA chapter and includes lunch for all attendees. To schedule the program, contact Jon Holtzee, director, State Government Affairs, at holtzeej@ada.org or call 1-800-621-8099, ext. 2525.

ASDA's Legislative Grassroots Network

ASDA's Legislative Grassroots Network (LGN) provides dental students with the opportunity to observe, speak, and be heard. This group of student leaders is dedicated to learning and understanding the political process in order to best represent the voice of the dental student population. Led by a motivated, independent ASDA leader, the selected legislative liaisons inform students across the country of the new legislation that affects students, dentists and patients.

Leaders for the LGN include the ASDA Consultant on Legislation and ASDA's representative to the American Dental Political Action Committee, as well as regional legislative coordinators and coordinators at every dental school. One key activity for the LGN includes National Lobby Day, held every spring in Washington DC. The event includes a full day of training for LGN volunteers, followed by a second day of visits to Capitol Hill. The 2004 event attracted 175 dental students and addressed issues such as the deductibility of student loan interest and consolidation, graduate medical education and more.

Who can join? ASDA's LGN consists of representatives from each school who are dedicated to increasing student understanding and involvement in politics so that they may be able to form opinions on matters concerned with dentistry. Here, thousands of students are able to express their concerns in an effort to shape legislation that will affect your future.

LGN representatives provide guidance and assistance to ASDA chapters that wish to take action in regards to specific legislation. They also have the opportunity to visit the Capitol in Washington for National Lobby Day to hear first-hand about ongoing legislative issues while voicing their opinions.

How does it work? Lawmakers present new laws to Congress on a regular basis, and they generally come from the viewpoints and concerns of the constituents who support them. In dentistry, the constituents are dental students and dentists who speak in a consistent voice on behalf of the profession. Congressional support for an issue depends largely upon the expressed views of constituents.

Any interested dental student is encouraged to join the Legislative Grassroots Network, and if there isn't a network on your campus, you can form one through your ASDA chapter. Ask your ASDA delegate for assistance, and get started by selecting a legislative liaison as your leader. This person will oversee all political activities at your chapter and keep the members informed. Next, pull together a group of motivated students who are interested in the political process (your legislative committee) and you're on your way!

Activities

Some of the most popular activities hosted by the LGN include ADA's *Pizza and Politics Lunch and Learns*, voter registration and ADPAC drives, *Meet and Greets*, and letter writing campaigns. Also, for state and national lobby days, the LGN is known for its very active presence.

The 2004-05 ASDA Legislative Grassroots Network leaders include:

Lynse Briney, ASDA Consultant on Legislation (lbrine1@uic.edu)

Paul Nielson, ADPAC representative (pnielson@u.washington.edu)

Britt Soden, regional legislative coordinator, regions 1-6 (bsoden@bu.edu)

Enoch Kim, regional legislative coordinator, regions 7-11 (enochk@ucla.edu)

Frequently Asked Questions About ADPAC

What is a PAC?

Political action committees allow like-minded citizens — in the ADA's case, dentists — to contribute relatively small amounts of money to a common fund. The PAC then uses the fund to contribute to the campaigns of candidates they support. By pooling their resources into the American Dental Political Action Committee, individual dentists have significant impact on the political process. The American Dental Political Action Committee is a voluntary, non-profit, non-partisan group of dentists and their spouses whose goal is to elect federal candidates who are responsive to dentistry.

Why does ADA need a PAC?

The federal government is a constant, sometimes intrusive presence in the dental office. Regulations drive up operating costs. Federal laws — such as ERISA — tilt the playing field against dentists trying to compete with managed care companies. Dental health policy was being shaped without dentistry's involvement. Politicians were identifying dentists' problems and even trying to solve them without the profession's advice. We needed to tell our side of the story. We need lawmakers in Washington who understand dentistry and oral health care. ADPAC and your state PAC are dentistry's best hope of electing them.

Do PACs give special interests too much control over government?

No. The more than 4,000 PACs that participate in congressional elections represent the full spectrum of views — labor, big business, pro- and anti-abortion rights, pro- and anti-gun control, insurers, managed care companies, physicians, nurses, you name it. This great diversity ensures that everyone's view is heard. Without PACs, the wealthiest individuals and organizations would have much greater control over the political dialogue.

Don't we need to reform the way we finance campaigns in this country?

Yes, but PACs are a solution, not the problem. In fact, none of the allegations of questionable campaign finance in the 1996 election involved PACs. PAC contributions are among the best documented and accounted-for campaign funds. The Federal Election Commission closely tracks PAC campaign contributions and makes the information available to the public and the media.

ADPAC is the voice of thousands of dentists who care deeply about their patients and their profession. Most of them only contribute \$40 per year. ADPAC's sole purpose is to elect candidates who understand the importance of dentistry and are committed to the nation's oral health.

What is a state PAC?

Like ADPAC, state political action committees are voluntary, non-profit, non-partisan groups of dentists and their spouses who seek to elect state and county candidates who are knowledgeable about dentistry. Each state appoints a chairperson as its liaison to ADPAC. ADPAC communicates regularly with each of the state PAC chairs.

Do ADPAC and the state PACs work together?

YES! They are a team working together to raise dentistry's profile in state legislatures and the U.S. Congress. State PACs are the life support system for ADPAC. ADPAC and state PACs cooperatively educate and organize dentists for political involvement. ADPAC relies on state PACs for information on the quality and effectiveness of candidates from each state. The states, in turn, rely on ADPAC to identify fundraising opportunities that provide the financial backing for local candidates. ADPAC offers several programs that serve as fundraising tools for state PACs such as direct mail, telemarketing, opinion surveys and the ADPAC Seminar Series program.

Who is the leadership and administrative support for ADPAC?

ADPAC is led by a Board of Directors that includes an ADPAC Chairman; one representative from each of the 16 ADA trustee districts; two members of the ADA Board of Trustees; a representative of the Alliance of the American Dental Association; and a representative of the American Student Dental Association. Administrative support for the ADPAC Board is supplied by ADPAC staff members based in the ADA Washington office. The staff consists of a Director, Managers of ADPAC and Political Education, Coordinator of Political Education and an Administrative Secretary.

Who decides which candidates receive ADPAC support?

Dentists who serve as ADPAC Board members make the decisions. Each of the 16 ADA Trustees appoints one member to the ADPAC Board. The ADPAC Board studies all Congressional races and decides which candidates to support. Key ingredients for candidates to support are issue orientation, electability and, most important, local dental input.

How can I be sure ADPAC won't contribute to candidates who oppose my party?

You can't. Issues, not party affiliation, drive ADPAC. But you can be sure ADPAC will contribute only to candidates who support dentistry. ADPAC is non-partisan, a special interest in the best sense of the phrase. ADPAC's board of volunteer dentists chooses candidates based primarily on two factors: The candidates' relationships with dentists in their home districts and their commitment to oral health issues.

Is ADPAC really effective?

Very effective. Along with volunteer dentists and ADA professional staff, ADPAC is one component of organized dentistry's strategy in Washington. In the 1998 elections, ADPAC backed winners in 27 of 30 Senate races and 300 of 315 House races. These members of Congress know that their positions on the issues matter to ADA members. They know that dentistry is health care that works.

And, ADPAC does more than contribute to campaigns. The PAC also supports the ADA's network of Grassroots Action Teams, more than 13,000 dentists and spouses, with members in all 435 congressional districts, who give their time and energy to hand-carry dentistry's message to Congress.

Why should I join ADPAC?

Dentistry's voice would not be as strong without the support of ADPAC members. ADPAC and your state PAC are a winning team, but only if you are a player. Dentistry needs you to do your fair share to maintain a strong presence in Washington and the state capitols. Every year, about 35 percent of ADA member dentists join ADPAC. Their support is directly responsible for ADA's outstanding record in Washington. Your help is more important now than ever before. Just think what we could accomplish with 50, 75 or 100 percent participation. If every member does his or her fair share, we will benefit.

What is the Capital Club?

ADA members who want to make a stronger commitment to being an ADPAC leader may join the Capital Club. Capital Club membership for dentists requires a donation of at least \$200; for dental students, the donation level is just \$50.

How can I learn more about PACs?

You can find out more about the state PAC by contacting your state dental association. For more information about ADPAC, contact Frank Ryan at ryanf@ada.org or call 202-789-5168.

State Advocacy Activities

Working with your State Associations

The Department of State Government Affairs (DSGA) assists constituent dental societies by:

- Monitoring and reporting on legislative and regulatory activities in all 50 states;
- Developing strategies that provide information and analyses of laws and regulations;
- Offering training programs known as *Legislative Education and Awareness for Dentists* (L.E.A.D.) and visits dental schools making lunch presentations known as *Pizza and Politics* to dental schools.

Other state issues include:

- Access to dental care, licensure (dental hygiene, dentist license by credential, specialty licensure);
- Third party reimbursement (patient protection legislation, prompt payment, equal reimbursement, TMJ benefit, etc.);
- Public health issues (fluoridation, amalgam safety, and mercury/amalgam wastewater discharge from dental offices, etc.).

From hosting symposiums to collecting and sharing data and strategies, DSGA brings people and organizations together to seek solutions to improve access to oral health services.