



## ADA 101

The American Dental Association (ADA) exists to power the profession of dentistry and to assist our members in advancing the overall oral health of their patients.

We are strong advocates for our members – promoting the art and science of dentistry. Our mission is to ensure all member dentists have what they need to provide the best possible patient care.

We are also strong advocates for public health – fighting oral cancer and combating the opioid crisis – and we're teaming up with industry partners to help everyone stay healthy from the dental chair to daily care at home.

We will continue working toward our vision – working side by side with our 159,000 member dentists – to achieve optimal health for all.

### The Dentist's Role

Dentists are doctors who specialize in oral health. Their responsibilities include:

- Diagnosing oral diseases.
- Promoting oral health and disease prevention.
- Creating treatment plans to maintain or restore the oral health of their patients.
- Interpreting x-rays and diagnostic tests.
- Ensuring the safe administration of anesthetics.
- Monitoring growth and development of the teeth and jaws.
- Performing surgical procedures on the teeth, bone and soft tissues of the oral cavity.

Dentists' oversight of the clinical team is critical to ensuring safe and effective oral care. Even seemingly routine procedures such as tooth extractions, preparing and placing fillings or administering anesthetics carry potential risks of complications such as infection, temporary or even permanent nerve damage, prolonged bleeding, hematomas and pain.

### Not Just Teeth and Gums

Dentists' areas of care include not only their patients' teeth and gums, but also the muscles of the head, neck and jaw, the tongue, salivary glands, the nervous system of the head and neck and other areas. During a comprehensive exam, dentists examine the teeth and gums, but they also look for lumps, swellings, discolorations, ulcerations — any abnormality. When appropriate, they perform procedures such as biopsies, diagnostic tests for chronic or infectious diseases, salivary gland function, and screening tests for oral cancer.

In addition, dentists can spot early warning signs in the mouth that may indicate disease elsewhere in the body. Dentists' training also enables them to recognize situations that warrant referring patients for care by dental specialists or physicians.

### Education and Clinical Training

The level of education and clinical training required to earn a dental degree, and the high academic standards of dental schools, are on par with those of medical schools and are essential to preparing dentists for the safe and effective practice of modern oral health care.

Notice that while most dentists are listed with a “DDS”, some may be listed as “DMD”. They both mean the same thing—the dentist graduated from an accredited dental school. The DDS (Doctor of Dental Surgery) and DMD (Doctor of Medicine in Dentistry or Doctor of Dental Medicine) are the same degrees. Dentists who have a DMD or DDS have the same education. It's up to the universities to determine what degree is awarded, but both degrees use the same curriculum requirements.

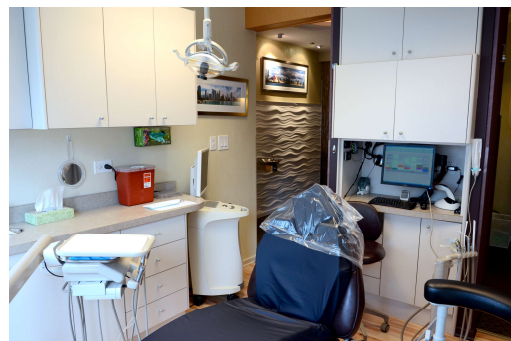


# ADA Dentist and Student Lobby Day



After earning their undergraduate and dental degrees (eight years for most) many dentists continue their education and training. Some become specialists in: dental anesthesiology, dental public health, endodontics, oral and maxillofacial pathology, oral and maxillofacial radiology, oral and maxillofacial surgery, oral medicine, orofacial pain, orthodontics, pediatric dentistry, periodontics, or prosthodontics.

Upon completing their training, dentists must pass both a rigorous national written examination and a state or regional clinical licensing exam in order to practice. As a condition of licensure, they must meet continuing education requirements for the remainder of their careers, to keep them up-to-date on the latest scientific and clinical developments.



## Why Oral Health Matters

Numerous recent scientific studies indicate associations between oral health and a variety of general health conditions — including diabetes and heart disease. In response, the World Health Organization has integrated oral health into its chronic disease prevention efforts "as the risks to health are linked."

The American Dental Association recommends that dental visits begin no later than a child's first birthday to establish a "dental home." Dentists can provide guidance to children and parents, deliver preventive oral health services, and diagnose and treat dental disease in its earliest stages. This ongoing dental care will help both children and adults maintain optimal oral health throughout their lifetimes.

## Improving the Nation's Oral Health

Despite all we know about the importance of oral health to overall health, to people's self-esteem and to their employability, state and federal policies continually sell dental care short.

- Most states spend 2 percent or less of their Medicaid budgets on dental services.
- Overall productivity losses in the United States associated with untreated oral disease were estimated to be \$52.1 billion in 2021 dollars.

The American Dental Association is committed to improving the nation's oral health through public education and through legislative advocacy to strengthen funding for dental services provided through public health programs.

## ADA Congressional Affairs Contacts

We look forward to working with you in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress! Please feel free to contact us with any questions regarding oral health. For more information about our legislative issues, visit [ada.org/advocacy](http://ada.org/advocacy).

Chris Tampio, *Director, Congressional Affairs*  
[tampioc@ada.org](mailto:tampioc@ada.org), 202.789.5178

Megan Mortimer, *Congressional Lobbyist*  
[mortimerm@ada.org](mailto:mortimerm@ada.org), 202.898.2402

Jennifer Fisher, *Congressional Lobbyist*  
[fisherj@ada.org](mailto:fisherj@ada.org), 202.789.5160

Natalie Hales, *Congressional Lobbyist*  
[halesn@ada.org](mailto:halesn@ada.org), 202.898.2404