



Protect and Restore the Federal Oral Health Infrastructure

Ask: Ensure the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) maintains senior-level dental leadership and technical expertise across key agencies, so federal oral health investments are effectively administered, coordinated, and accountable.

Why it matters

- Federal oral health programs support prevention, infection control, workforce training, coverage policy, and research that improve health outcomes nationwide.
- Reductions in dedicated oral health capacity increase the risk that oral health priorities are overlooked or managed as fragmented, agency-by-agency efforts rather than as a coordinated national infrastructure.

Key facts

- CDC prevention: Community water fluoridation reduces tooth decay by about 25 percent in children and adults.
- CDC capacity: The CDC Division of Oral Health was significantly downgraded in April 2025, reducing federal support for oral health surveillance and prevention technical assistance to states and territories. Many state dental board rules reference CDC infection control guidance.
- CMS leadership: The CMS Chief Dental Officer position has been vacant, and stakeholders have urged CMS to fill and retain the role as a senior, agency-wide position within the Office of the Administrator.
- HRSA workforce: In academic year 2022-2023, HRSA oral health training programs supported 5,540 dental and dental hygiene students and professionals. Of graduates, 69 percent served in medically underserved communities, and 20 percent served in primary care settings after graduation.
- HRSA capacity: The HRSA Chief Dental Officer position was eliminated April 2025, reducing dedicated federal oversight of dental workforce programs and initiatives.

What Congress can do

- CMS: Direct CMS to fill the Chief Dental Officer position and maintain it within the Office of the Administrator to guide oral health policy across Medicaid, CHIP, Medicare, and other coverage programs.
- CDC: Support restoration of dedicated oral health capacity to assist states with surveillance, fluoridation technical assistance, and prevention programs, including school-based sealant initiatives.
- HRSA: Ensure HRSA has dedicated oral health leadership capacity to oversee Title VII oral health workforce programs and related initiatives.
- NIH: Protect dedicated dental, oral, and craniofacial research capacity and expertise within NIH, including maintaining a clear NIDCR mission in the annual appropriations process.

Information:

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Agencies: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS); Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA); National Institutes of Health (NIH); National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research.
Programs: Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)