Preventing Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Discrimination in Dentist Licensure and Credentialing – Resource Toolkit

ATTESTATION MODEL: CASE STUDY ABOUT THE IOWA DENTAL BOARD (IDB)

Summary

After the tragic loss of an Iowa dentist who died by suicide in 2020, the Iowa Dental Association and the Iowa Dental Board (IDB) recognized the urgency in addressing dental providers' mental health and eliminating stigmatizing language on dentists' initial and renewal applications. The goals were twofold: reduce stigma surrounding mental health conditions, and encourage licensees to seek mental health care, should they need it, without fear of punitive action. IDB audited initial and renewal applications and in June 2024, the changes were updated. Now, every dentist who completes an initial application, or renews their license, does not need to answer any questions related to medical conditions, alcohol, or drugs. Further, every Iowa dentist answers a revised question about participation in a state monitoring program.

HOW IS IDB ADDRESSING LICENSURE REFORM*?

The Iowa Dental Board was aware of another state licensing board that had used an attestation approach. Since June 2024, dentists' initial and renewal questions in Iowa have been changed as follows:

1. All questions related to medical conditions have been removed.
2. All questions related to alcohol or drugs have been removed.
3. The following question related to current participation in a state monitoring program has been updated:
   Are you currently participating in a confidential monitoring program in a state other than Iowa? Yes/No?
4. The following attestation has been added:

Health Notice

The Board recognizes that licensees may struggle with health concerns, just like their patients, including mental health conditions, physical disabilities, and substance use disorders, which may impact practice.

The Board expects its licensees to properly address health concerns by seeking medical care, and/or limiting their practice, when appropriate.

The Board encourages licensees to utilize its practitioner health programs when the symptoms of a health concern may have the potential to impair the ability to practice. More information can be found here: https://dial.iowa.gov/i-need/licenses/medical/iowa-professional-health-programs

The inability of a licensee to meet the minimum standard of care as a result of inadequately addressing any health condition, which may impair their ability to practice with reasonable skill and safety to patients, could result in Board review.

**I have read and understand the statements above.*

- ○ *I acknowledge*

Applicants for licensure are asked if they are currently participating in a confidential monitoring program in a state other than Iowa. This question is confidential and is not shared with the Board.

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This information allows state monitoring programs to work together to support participants who may work in multiple states. There are rare instances where a participant may need to immediately cease practice due to safety concerns and this allows states to quickly share information.

Collaboration among confidential state monitoring programs allows states to support the licensee no matter where they are working, and to ensure that public protection measures are in place.

*In 2026, the Iowa Dental Board submitted their updated initial and renewal licensure applications to the Dr. Lorna Breen Foundation for verification. On August 21, 2026 Iowa's dental licensure applications were awarded the Wellbeing First Champions badge, signaling a strong commitment to prioritizing mental health for Iowa's dentists.

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE IOWA DENTAL WORKFORCE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING STAKEHOLDER WORKGROUP'S EFFORTS**.

The Iowa Dental Workforce Mental Health and Well-Being Stakeholder Workgroup was brought together in 2023 with the intent of building a cross-sectional workgroup that would create a framework, plan and environment to facilitate early identification of mental health problems and encourage help seeking. The stakeholder group is comprised of representatives from the Iowa Dental Association, dentists, Delta Dental of Iowa, physicians, Iowa Dental Board, funders, University of Iowa College of Dentistry, and mental health therapists.

The Stakeholder Workgroup has developed a three-year strategic plan to improve the comprehensive mental health and well-being of Iowa dentists. The plan has three strategic priorities:

1.) **Prevention and early intervention** – to create an open culture around mental health and well-being reducing the stigma associated with mental health issues and topics,

2.) **Workplace and community** – to build and sustain positive work and learning environments and,

3.) **Tools and resources** – to develop, evaluate and implement tools, skills, and resources to enable individuals in the dental community to thrive.

Implementation of the first year of the strategic plan has focused on the following action steps:

- *Provide timely access to professional, high-quality mental health services that promote the mental and emotional well-being of dental professionals.* We have begun working collaboratively to establish program parameters, a potential service provider, and initial process for engagement of dentists. If the program is approved, dentists would have access to 3 free mental health counseling sessions each year.

- *Connecting the dental workforce to available resources.* Methods for the provision and distribution of resources regarding mental health, suicide prevention, and well-being to occur through newsletters, social media, presentations, group meetings and videos.

**On January 1, 2025, the Iowa Dental Advocacy for Professional and Personal Thriving (IADAPT) program was launched, offering confidential, executive coaching and therapy services to Iowa dentists. IADAPT recognizes that dentistry can be an extremely rewarding career, but it comes with its own challenges and complications. This program was thoughtfully designed to address the complex, career-specific challenges dentists may encounter throughout their career, through specialized and personalized support. Each Iowa dentist is eligible for three free sessions every 12 months, with pathways to continue receiving services, if desired.

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TESTIMONIAL

"The Iowa Dental Association is dedicated to meeting the needs of our member dentists. We understand that the practice of dentistry can be extremely rewarding, but it also comes with a variety of challenges, including feelings of isolation, overwhelming responsibilities, and perfectionism. Dentists do not need to face these struggles alone, which is why we have dedicated time and resources to finding supportive solutions to mental health challenges."
– Dr. Chris Bogue, IDA President

Questions? Email Laurie Traetow, CAE, Executive Director, Iowa Dental Association at laurie@iowadental.org

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