



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

ATTESTATION MODEL*: CASE STUDY ABOUT THE OREGON DENTAL ASSOCIATION (ODA) AND THE OREGON BOARD OF DENTISTRY (OBD)

Summary

*The original ODA case study, published on October 29, 2024, was updated to reflect a vote by the Oregon Board of Dentistry late in 2024.

On December 13, 2024, the [Oregon Board of Dentistry](#) passed a motion that removed stigmatizing mental health questions, including those about substance use disorders, from initial licensure and renewal licensure applications for dentists and dental hygienists. Before this update, “Have You Ever” questions related to receiving counseling, therapy or treatment for mental health issues, including substance misuse, focused on past diagnoses and treatment, instead of focusing on current impairment. The updated initial and renewal licensure application questions are expected to take effect in February 2025. The updated licensure questions align with those of the [Oregon Medical Board](#) (OMB).

Since the summer of 2023, the [ODA](#) focused on reforming the licensure process. In August of 2023, the ODA sent a letter, co-signed by the [Oregon Dental Hygienists' Association \(ODHA\)](#), to formally express their concerns regarding questions related to licensure and re-licensure. Doctors Barry Taylor and Julie Spaniel brought the issue before the OBD in person to review. Doctors Taylor and Spaniel informed the Oregon Board of Dentistry that the OMB had already changed its line of questioning. Fortunately, the ODA the OBD have open communication. The matter was referred to the Licensing, Standards, and Competency Committee. The goal was to align the dentist licensure applications with the Oregon Medical Board’s language which focuses on current impairment, as opposed to past diagnoses or treatment.

WHY DID ODA DECIDE TO REVIEW LICENSURE APPLICATION QUESTIONS AND ENCOURAGE THE OBD TO REMOVE STIGMATIZING LANGUAGE? WHAT DID ODA LEARN FROM THE OREGON BOARD OF MEDICINE AND THEIR EFFORTS?

Licensure reform was brought to the attention of the ODA after hearing of changes made around the country with medical licensure and credentialing. After reviewing a letter to the Department of Justice (DOJ) in 2023 written by our two Oregon U.S. Senators, ODA realized they wanted to address stigmatizing questions on their dental licensure applications. Language such as, “Have you ever sought treatment...”, may cause a barrier to seeking help for mental health issues and/or substance use disorders. The OMB had already set a precedent by changing their line of questioning to an Attestation Model suggested by the [Federation of State Medical Boards](#), the American Medical Association, and Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes’ Foundation. OMB’s attestation model is similar to what the Texas State Board of Dental Examiners accomplished on behalf of their licensees.

NOW THAT LICENSURE REFORM OCCURED IN OREGON, HOW DOES THE ODA PLAN TO COMMUNICATE APPLICATION QUESTION CHANGES WITH YOUR MEMBERS?

With the official OBD vote to update licensure application questions, the ODA will promote awareness through its monthly publication, Membership Matters, email communications to their members, public social media posts, and local component-level announcements. The ODA is raising awareness about their ADA Trustee District 11-wide, Wellness Initiative at the component level and will create awareness around these changes in the initial and renewal licensure applications for dentists and dental hygienists. The ODA acknowledges that it is essential to bring any message regarding application question change to all dentists in Oregon, not just member dentists. An [ADA News article](#) showcased Oregon’s advocacy efforts with their coalition partners including ODHA, [Permanente](#)



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[Dental Associates](#), [Willamette Dental Group](#), [Gentle Dental](#), [Delta Dental of Oregon](#), and [Capitol Dental](#) representing 75% of dentists in the state.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE KEY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES THAT EXIST?

The ODA and OBD have a shared goal of protecting the public's health. It takes patience and persistence to educate a board of dentistry that intrusive language on dentist licensure applications might inhibit a provider from pursuing mental health care. It takes time to ensure members of the OBD understand why changes in licensure applications may be in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. As a first step, ODA aligned language in dentists' licensure application questions, with those of Oregon physicians.

WHAT IS THE ODA LEARNING FROM PURSUING LICENSURE REFORM AND WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER STATES THAT ARE INTERESTED IN ADDRESSING LICENSURE REFORM?

Change will happen by bringing together the voices of a majority of licensed professionals. The ODA believes that developing or creating relationships with state dental associations and state boards of dentistry is essential. The coalition with the Oregon Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) is important. Other key coalition partners included Permanente Dental Associates, Willamette Dental Group, Gentle Dental, Delta Dental of Oregon, and Capitol Dental. Coalition building within our state, with the ADHA and larger corporate practices increased the chances of successful licensure reform.

SUMMARIZE ANY ADDITIONAL NEXT STEPS ODA IS PURSUING TO CONTINUE TO ADVOCATE FOR PROVIDER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OR POLICY CHANGES THAT STRIVE TO ELIMINATE PUNITIVE ACTION A PROVIDER MAY FACE SHOULD THEY SEEK MENTAL HEALTH OR SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER CARE?

ODA continues to educate and normalize the conversation on mental health and well-being at the Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU) and with our early career dentists. Doctors Taylor and Spaniel, and other ODA members, are committed to regularly educating OHSU dental students about safeguarding their physical and mental health. ODA collaborates with Wellness Ambassadors from the American Student Dental Association (ASDA), in ADA Trustee District 11. Together, these leaders support OHSU education efforts. Leaders share their personal stories, encouraging prevention and proactiveness, and inspire each other. The ODA is also currently working to improve their Peer-to-Peer Wellness Ambassador program by standardizing the training of the volunteers. The Oregon Dental Association is also working to strengthen their well-being coalition in ADA Trustee District 11 by sharing information about these Wellness Initiatives and programs with the four other states in its District: Washington, Idaho, Alaska, and Montana. ODA hopes to expand their efforts to the Western region of the U.S.

TESTIMONIAL

Coalition building within our states, with the Hygiene Association and larger corporate practices, will increase our chances of successful licensure reform. Change will happen by bringing together the voices of a majority of licensed professionals. Julie Spaniel, D.D.S., ODA Board of Trustees, ODA Chair Wellness Initiative, ADA Wellness Ambassador and ADA Dental Team Wellness Advisory Committee Consultant.

[Questions?](#) Email Dr. Barry Taylor, Executive Director Oregon Dental Association at btaylor@oregondental.org or Dr. Julie Spaniel at djsdds1@gmail.com

APPENDIX



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[Congressional Letter to U.S. Department of Justice Regarding Intrusive Mental Health Questions](#)

[U.S. Department of Justice Response to Senator Wyden](#)

[Coalition Letter of Support to the Oregon Board of Dentistry for Licensure Reform](#)