



California Dental Hygienists' Association
The Voice of Dental Hygiene

June 20, 2025

To: Susan DeMarois, Director; California Department of Aging
From: Vickie Kimbrough, MBA, RDH, President; California Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA)
Jeannette Diaz, DHSc, MPH, MSDH, RDH, RDHAP, Public Relations Council Co-Chair; CDHA
Paula Lee, MPH, RDHAP, Public Relations Council Co-Chair; CDHA
Re: 2025-2029 Older Americans Act State Plan on Aging

Dear Director DeMarois,

On behalf of the California Dental Hygienists' Association (CDHA), we commend the California Department of Aging (CDA) for its comprehensive and equity-focused 2025-2029 State Plan on Aging. As oral health professionals dedicated to the well-being of Californians, we respectfully urge the CDA to incorporate oral health promotion and dental disease prevention as a priority for older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers within the State Plan's goals and objectives.

Oral health is linked to overall health and can impact quality of life, especially for older adults. Evidence shows there is a bidirectional [link between oral health and systemic conditions](#), including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's disease, autoimmune disease, respiratory disease, and malnutrition. Poor oral health has also been linked to aspiration pneumonia, especially for older adults living in nursing homes.

Older adults often experience many of these chronic health conditions along with challenges accessing dental care, which increases their risk for oral disease.

A report by the [Center for Oral Health](#) (2018) found that older adults in California have high rates of untreated dental decay, periodontal disease, and tooth loss.

- Half of older adults living in skilled nursing homes have untreated tooth decay
- One-third of older adults in skilled nursing facilities have lost all of their teeth
- Nearly 40% of Californians living in nursing homes are unable to chew
- 18% of community-dwelling Californians are unable to chew
- 46% of community-dwelling Californians need treatment for tooth decay and/or periodontal disease.

Additionally, dental care was included among the top five services that were needed and not met in the results of the [Survey of LGBTQIA+ Older Adults in California](#), published in November 2024.

Oral cancers are also more prevalent in older adults, particularly those living in rural areas. Additionally, older adults often experience dry mouth due to salivary function decline and a common side effect of prescribed medications, which can exacerbate dental decay and periodontal disease. Individuals from racially and ethnically diverse communities, as well as those with lower incomes or those residing in rural areas, experience disproportionately high rates of dental disease. Individuals from racially and ethnically diverse communities, as well as those with lower incomes or those residing in rural areas, experience disproportionately high rates of dental disease. Poor oral health can increase the risk for infections and dental pain, as well as affect sleep, self-esteem, socialization, and negatively impact productivity. There is also an economic impact of dental disease that burdens our healthcare delivery systems and public resources. Unfortunately, oral health is often overlooked in initiatives related to aging.

To strengthen the impact of the 2025-2029 California State Plan on Aging, we would like to propose the following recommendations for inclusion:

Goal 1: Enhance Outreach, Information, and Assistance

Recommendation:



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- To integrate oral health education and dental referral resources within outreach campaigns for older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers with increased attention to those with the greatest economic and social needs.
- Consider including a tab on dental on the CDA's website under Programs and Services.
- Consider including metrics related to dental care in the Master Plan for Aging's Data Dashboard. For example, access to dental care, yearly dental visits, and perceived dental care.

Goal 2: Increase Opportunities to Age-in-Place in Home and Community-Based Settings

Recommendation:

- Include information about community-based and in-home dental services for older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers to support choice and expand access to health and supportive services.
- Collaborate with Registered Dental Hygienists in Alternative Practice and the CA Department of Public Health's Office of Oral Health, and the Department of Healthcare Services' Medi-Cal Dental program to integrate oral health promotion, dental disease prevention, and oral health screenings within existing health promotion and nutrition counseling programs.
- Partner with dental hygienists to assist in efforts to prevent fraud, abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older adults.

Goal 3: Prevent Isolation, Promote Inclusion, and Advocate for Elder Justice

- *Recommendation:* Consider the role of the dental hygienist in helping to support prevention and early identification of fraud, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Goal 4: Strengthen Partnerships

- *Recommendation:* Include dental hygienists as key stakeholders and partners of CDA to ensure the complex dental needs of older adults and people with disabilities are met.

Goal 5: Advance Strategies to Improve Financial Security and Economic Support

- *Recommendation:* Advocate for the expansion of dental benefits and funding for programming related to oral health for older adults and people with disabilities.

Goal 6: Support Aging Services Providers Statewide

- *Recommendation:* To support training and technical assistance for caregivers, case managers, and providers who are caring for older adults, people with disabilities, and family caregivers.

Thank you for your leadership in advancing a more equitable and responsive aging system in California. By integrating oral health into the State Plan on Aging, the California Department of Aging has the opportunity to improve health outcomes, reduce disparities, and enhance quality of life for older adults, people with disabilities, and their caregivers. The California Dental Hygienists' Association remains committed to supporting these efforts and welcomes continued collaboration to ensure oral health is recognized as essential to overall health and well-being.

Respectfully,

Dr. Vickie Kimbrough, MBA, RDH
President, 2024-2026

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