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**Florida Dental Association Applauds Florida Legislature
for Milestone Funding to Increase Access to Critical Routine Dental Care**
*\$2 Million in Recurring State Funding for Dental Student Loan Repayment and Donated
Dental Services Programs Will Connect Dentists to Communities and Patients in Need*

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (May 2, 2023) – The Florida Dental Association applauds the Florida Legislature’s commitment to helping promote oral health for all Floridians, including the allocation of \$2 million in recurring funding to implement Florida’s dental student loan repayment and Donated Dental Services programs.

“The Florida Dental Association thanks the Florida Legislature for providing funding for these two programs to improve oral health, and resulting overall health, for all Floridians, by bringing dentists to where they are needed most,” said Dr. Gerald Bird, president of the Florida Dental Association (FDA). “With this investment, Florida dentists can start helping thousands of patients in need this year through these two programs.”

This milestone funding will support the implementation of Florida’s dental student loan repayment program to encourage dentists to practice in public health programs and serve low-income patients in designated rural and underserved areas. Florida is one of only five states without a dental student loan repayment program, and dentists graduate with student loan debt averaging at \$300,000. Participating dentists may receive \$50,000 a year to help repay their loans and can serve in the program for up to five years.

This funding will also expand Florida’s Donated Dental Services program, which recruits and connects volunteer dentists with seniors and individuals who have disabilities or are medically compromised, to provide comprehensive dental services – at no cost – in dentists’ offices with support from volunteer dental labs to provide supplies like crowns and dentures. Oral health is critical to maintaining overall health, particularly for individuals managing chronic diseases or conditions, or undergoing critical medical procedures or treatments.

Additionally, \$500,000 in funding was provided to support the 2024 *Florida Mission of Mercy*, which is an annual two-day dental event sponsored by the FDA Foundation to provide treatment to patients, who for many reasons, lack access to dental care. The *Florida Mission of Mercy* is held in a different city each year, and previous events held in Tampa, Jacksonville, Pensacola, Fort Myers, Orlando, Tallahassee and West Palm Beach have provided more than 13,000 patients with donated dental care valued at more than \$13.5 million.

The FDA also applauds the inclusion of a sales tax exemption on oral hygiene products in the tax package to be approved by the Florida Legislature this week. Oral hygiene and preventive care, including brushing twice a day and flossing daily, are critical to keeping teeth and mouths healthy.

“Oral health has far-reaching impacts on the overall health and well-being of our communities,” said Dr. Bird. “By supporting solutions that promote access to routine dental services and preventive care for all Floridians, we can make a lasting impact on people’s lives, health, and futures.”

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About the Florida Dental Association

As the state’s premier professional organization representing Florida-licensed dentists, the Florida Dental Association (FDA) serves as Florida’s advocate for oral health. A constituent society of the American Dental Association, the FDA was established in 1884 to ensure patients receive the highest quality of care from dental professionals. The FDA is the leading expert and advocate on issues affecting Florida dentists and the oral health of Floridians. To learn more, visit floridadental.org.