

Testimony of Ann Hoffman

Central Penn College

Senate Majority Policy Committee Hearing on Dental Workforce Shortages

My name is Ann Hoffman, and I serve as the Dental Program Director at Central Penn College in Enola. Before transitioning into education, I spent over 15 years as a clinical dental hygienist, caring for diverse patient populations and improving oral health outcomes.

There are moments in dentistry that stay with you-like, patients who simply did not have access to care. And one thing remains the same: small problems do not stay small in dentistry, and they do not just affect the mouth.

Some of the most impactful moments in my clinical work were not just providing care, but in educating patients on how to maintain oral health and helping them understand how closely oral health is connected to overall systemic health.

This passion has carried into my role in education. Today, I have the privilege of teaching and mentoring future dental professionals through our dental assisting and EFDA programs.

I recognize that I do not need to repeat all the well-documented consequences of limited access to oral healthcare. These statistics have been shared-the emergency room visits, missed school days, and broader health impacts that could have been prevented with proper preventive care.

Instead, I'm here to speak about solutions, specifically the work being done at Central Penn College to address the dental workforce shortage in Pennsylvania.

At its core, this issue comes down to numbers. We simply do not have enough dental hygienists-preventative providers, to meet the needs of our communities.

And the issue is not a lack of interest. There is a strong interest in dental hygiene, but there is not enough opportunity or capacity to educate students.

In Pennsylvania, there are approximately 13 dental hygiene programs, unevenly distributed with clear gaps in rural areas. At that same time, we are facing a projected 30 to 40 percent reduction in the dental hygiene workforce by 2040.

Even more concerning is enrollment capacity. Accreditation standards and clinical space requirements significantly limit how many students' programs can accept.

One community college locally receives over 200 qualified applicants each year and is only able to accept 27 students. That means more than 150 qualified, motivated individuals are turned away annually, not because they are not capable, but because there is simply not enough capacity to educate them.

This is where Central Penn College stepped in to be part of the solution.

Central Penn College made a deliberate decision to focus on dental hygiene and expand access to education in this field. Although we are not located in a rural area, we are uniquely positioned to serve students from across the state.

What sets us apart is that we offer on campus housing, and housing scholarships, making education accessible to students from rural and underserved areas who may not otherwise have the opportunity to attend a dental program.

In just the past three and a half years, Central Penn College has built dental assisting, and expanded function dental assisting programs that are currently running and growing.

Building these programs is not simple, and it is not inexpensive. It requires curriculum development, faculty recruitment, equipment, lab space, and ongoing compliance with regulatory standards.

The Dental Accreditation application alone costs over \$18,000, but that pales in comparison to the more than \$1 million it will take to build a clinical facility.

The reality is that building a dental education program requires significant financial investment, sustained institutional commitment, and long-term planning.

Despite challenges, the outcomes at Central Penn College dental assisting and EFDA programs so far have been strong. We have successful graduating numbers, a 95% pass rate on Radiology Health and Safety exam, 92% pass rate on the infection control exam, and 100% pass rate on the EFDA state board licensure exam.

The impact of our work has been recognized across the region including awards from the Central Penn Business Journal, and recognition for leadership and community engagement. Most meaningfully, in 2025 Central Penn College received the Oral Health changemaker award by the Pennsylvania Coalition for Oral health, recognition that reflects the collective work of our faculty, students, leadership and community partners.

Now, despite all this progress we are at a critical point.

One of the most significant barriers we face moving forward is the need for an on-campus clinical facility.

For our dental hygiene program, accreditation requires a dedicated clinical training space. Without it, we cannot move forward with full program approval. But this clinic will serve a much greater purpose than accreditation alone.

This clinic would not only support our students, it would directly impact the communities we serve.

With a clinical facility, we would be able to provide care for Medicaid patients, and underserved populations who often struggle to access routine dental care. By increasing access to preventive and routine services, we can help reduce the number of patients who turn to hospital emergency rooms for dental related issues, an approach that is both costly and inefficient for the healthcare system.

This is an opportunity to address both workforce development and access to care at the same time.

I am grateful to be here today, advocating for public funding to help establish and expand dental hygiene education programs, including the one Central Penn College is building, programs that increase access to care and strengthen our workforce.

Central Penn College has demonstrated that we are ready to be part of the solution. In just a few short years we have built dental programs, graduated successful students and developed strong community partnerships.

With your support, we can continue this work of expanding access to care and strengthening Pennsylvania's dental workforce.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to addressing this critical issue.