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Advocacy Spotlight: The MDA Grassroots Program: Advocacy that Works!

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The MDA Grassroots Program: Advocacy That Works!

By Lynn Aronoff
Grassroots Legislative Coordinator

The MDA's Grassroots Legislative Advocacy Program has been highly successful since it began in 2011, and 2022 was no exception. With more than 145 contacts

between MDA members and their legislators taking place at 23 events, member participation proved to be lively, engaged, and essential to the MDA's advocacy success last year.

While the MDA staff is regularly in contact with key legislators on dental issues, legislators are most responsive to issues when they hear from their constituents — in our case, MDA dentists from their districts. By connecting our members with their legislators, the MDA can develop personal connections that keep the MDA as the top-of-mind resource on dental issues. These connections also help the MDA demonstrate a strong presence locally, and provide a unique perspective on how various issues will impact legislators' districts. And with

more than 50 new legislators taking office in January 2023, our grassroots program will continue to be a driving force behind the MDA's advocacy efforts in 2023.



Aronoff

Friendly and personable

One thing we hear from members who haven't participated before is that they are nervous or uncomfortable about meeting with a legislator.

That's understandable, but an important fact to remember is that legislators are normal people, despite the importance of their positions. Many legislators' interactions with dentistry are limited to their experiences getting dental care. In fact, it's likely that there are legislators who are as nervous about going to the dentist as you might be to attend a grassroots event! Legislators depend on you for support, so they are friendly and personable. No worries.

In 2022, nearly every grassroots meeting we held included a new participant, and their experiences were great! Most often, the legislators we meet with are always grateful for the opportunity to hear from the dentists they represent and come away with a new appreciation of the issues impacting dentists.

Every meeting is attended by MDA staff and me. We set up our meetings over lunch or coffee in a group setting to facilitate an open and comfortable atmosphere for everyone to discuss their perspectives. Every meeting goes a little differently, depending on what the most important issue of the day is and what attendees want to discuss. However, the goal of the MDA's Grassroots Program is remains the same: To make it easy for our members to engage in meaningful advocacy on the issues important to them.

If you're interested in participating in grassroots meetings or learning more, email me at lynn@actionstrat.com with your name and local component. I'll be in touch with you. ●

On the facing page . . .

Listed on the opposite page are the MDA's 2023 Advocacy Priorities, as developed by MDA leaders and staff. These are the priority initiatives the MDA will be working on this year. Watch for updates and reports on these various initiatives in each issue of the *Journal* throughout the year.

If you have questions or comments, let the MDA know! Email Neema Katibai, MDA manager of advocacy and insurance affairs, or Bill Sullivan, MDA vice president of advocacy and professional relations, at nkatibai@michigandental.org or bsullivan@michigandental.org, respectively.

2023 PRIORITIES FOR THE MICHIGAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION

DENTAL LOSS RATIO

The state of Massachusetts recently passed a ballot initiative that establishes a dental loss ratio of 83%. This means that starting in 2024, dental insurance companies in Massachusetts will have to show the state that at least 83% of patient premiums were used for patient care. If that threshold is not met, a company would have to issue a refund to the plan purchaser for the difference between what is actually spent on patient care and 83% of premiums. Additionally, the law provides other powers to the state insurance commissioner such as approving premium rate increases. The MDA will be working with the American Dental Association and other stakeholders to determine the best way forward on this issue.

DENTAL BENEFIT COMPANY TRANSPARENCY

Network leasing is when a dental benefit company sells or leases their network of dentists to another dental benefit company. Typically, the network dentists are not aware of the transaction. This causes confusion and frustration among patients and dentists because patient's coverage status' and fees are many times unknown until after care is provided. The MDA's goal is to add transparency to the practice of network leasing.

HOSPITAL AND AMBULATORY SURGICAL CENTER ACCESS

Many of Michigan's most vulnerable citizens require a hospital operator and general anesthesia to receive basic and complex dental care. In 2022, the MDA secured funding to increase the facility fee paid to ambulatory surgical centers and hospitals under Medicaid for dental services. However, inadequate funding in Medicaid for anesthesia services for dental procedures continues to pose a significant barrier to care. The MDA is working with MDHHS and stakeholders to secure state funding to resolve this issue.

TELEDENTISTRY

The emergence of telehealth over the last few years has resulted in broad legislation and rules, intended to facilitate care during the COVID-19 pandemic. The MDA has developed a legislative proposal that would address teledentistry specifically, ensuring that regulations assure patient safety and privacy, maintain the standard of care, and enhance the ability of providers to deliver care to their patients. The MDA will be working with the Legislature to introduce legislation on this issue.

WORKFORCE

Many professions have experienced a workforce shortage and dentistry is no exception. Over the past several years, dental offices have experienced a dwindling supply of RDHs, RDAs, and on-the-job trained assistants, as well as office support staff. The MDA is working with the ADA, other state associations, and stakeholders in Michigan to identify solutions that will address the shortage now and provide a sustainable talent pipeline for the dental workforce.

STUDENT DEBT CRISIS

Dentists are graduating with staggering amounts of student debt, which impact where they choose to practice, the patient populations they can treat, and the overall cost of dental care. Student debt relief will help curb rising healthcare costs and increase access to dental care.

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