



## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **For Immediate Release**

Delta Dental Plans Association  
1515 West 22nd Street  
Suite 450  
Oak Brook, Illinois 60523  
Telephone 630-574-6001  
Facsimile 630-574-6999

**Contact:**  
Chris Pyle, Director of Public Relations  
Delta Dental Plans Association  
630-574-6850  
cpyle@deltadental.com

### **Study Shows Future Decline in Dentist Supply Dentist Population Could Contract by 2012**

OAK BROOK, Ill (March 4, 2010) – If current trends continue, getting an appointment with a dentist might become more challenging in coming years. A recent survey by the independent research firm The Long Group, and sponsored by the not-for-profit Delta Dental Plans Association, found that the dentist population could begin to contract as early as 2012.

Researchers looked at current dentist retirement rates and at survey responses from dentists who expressed a desire to make a career change within the next five-to-ten years and compared those numbers with the current dentist school graduation rate. Projecting these trends into the future, the study found that the 2009 dentist population of approximately 179,600 will increase through 2011 but retirement and career changes could outpace dentist school graduation beginning in 2012. By 2019, the dentist population could be smaller by nearly 7,000, assuming consistent dental school graduates of 4,500 annually.

“As more people acquire dental coverage through an employer, an individual policy or through some form of government-assisted program, it is crucial that dentists are available to actually see and treat them,” said Kim E. Volk, president and CEO of Delta Dental Plans Association. “With more than 132,000 dentists participating in our network, we’re interested in helping affect, not just monitoring, these trends,” said Volk.

Groups such as Delta Dental and others are having success attracting dentists to underserved areas and are providing prospective dentists with some hope that they won’t leave school with insurmountable debt. According to the American Dental Education Association, graduates of dental school enter the workforce with an average of \$170,000 of debt. Increasingly, a dentist that is willing to practice in a federally designated dental

health professional shortage area can see \$80,000 - \$100,000 of debt wiped away over three-to-five years.

Dr. Arron McWilliams practices in rural Crawford County, Iowa, thanks in large part to the Fulfilling Iowa's Need for Dentists (FIND) program, funded jointly by Delta Dental of Iowa and local business, government, health and civic organizations. With a population of just over 7,000, the city of Denison might not have been the first choice of a dentist looking to establish a practice. "If it was not for the FIND program, Dr. McWilliams would be practicing in another community," said Don Luensmann, executive director of the Chamber and Development Council of Crawford County.

A similar sentiment is expressed by leaders in other rural parts of the country. "Our health care providers play a key role in our community's economy," said Jeffrey Johnson, branch president of BankWest in Gregory, South Dakota, a town with fewer than 2,000 people. "Delta Dental's loan repayment program is helping ensure that our city's one dental practice remains open," said Johnson.

"These types of programs are proving to be a win-win-win," said Volk. They're a win for the dentist who needs to pay down debt, a win for the local economy and a win for the residents in need of care."

Delta Dental member companies currently support dentist school loan repayment programs in Arkansas, Iowa, South Dakota, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. Delta Dental also invests millions of dollars in dental education throughout the country.

The not-for-profit Delta Dental Plans Association ([www.deltadental.com](http://www.deltadental.com)) based in Oak Brook, Ill., is the leading national network of independent dental service corporations specializing in providing dental benefits programs to 54 million Americans in more than 89,000 employee groups throughout the country.

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