



Oral health has been a silent epidemic for decades. Black¹ people in the United States across the life span face disproportionate burden of oral health diseases, such as cavities, periodontal disease, and head and neck cancers.^{2,3} There is a disproportionately low number of Black dentists and hygienists in the oral health workforce in relationship to the Black population.^{4,5} With the recent changes in federal and state policies and health care and prevention funding, there is significant potential for oral health inequities to grow rather than narrow. Reductions in the federal budget for programs such as Medicaid, elimination of oral health programs in the federal government at agencies⁶ and states ending community water fluoridation may not benefit the health of Black communities.

The Health Equity Call to Action (HECTA) Task Force has brought together leaders from various health disciplines and professional organizations to create a cohesive call to action to advance health equity. By connecting these professions together with dentistry and elevating oral-systemic-mental health, HECTA aims to take a holistic approach to support the overall health and wellbeing of Black communities. HECTA members are committed to:

- Emphasizing oral health resources in continuing education for health care providers and other professionals, oral self-care awareness and practices, and advocacy;
- Elevating workforce and professional pathways through mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership development; and
- Embedding oral health into whole-person care, including community health initiatives and medical-dental-behavioral integration.

By combining our efforts, we endeavor to advance health equity and improve overall health in the communities where we live, work, play, and worship.

¹ This consensus statement uses the term "Black" to describe diverse people who identify as African American and who have ancestry throughout the African diaspora. The members of the Health Equity Call to Action acknowledge that people of African descent have different cultural backgrounds and family experiences in the United States. Black is intended to be an inclusive term to encapsulate that diversity, while recognizing the social construct that is race and ethnicity.

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, 2000.

³ Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges: Executive Summary [Internet]. Bethesda (MD): National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (US); 2021 Dec. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.proxy-hs.researchport.umd.edu/books/NBK576536/>

⁴ American Dental Association Health Policy Institute. "Racial and Ethnic Mix of the Dentist Workforce in the U.S."

https://www.ada.org/-/media/project/ada-organization/ada-ada-org/files/resources/research/hpi/hpigraphic_0421_1.pdf?rev=aa1f41177af94613a74a307adc11f2f0&hash=8F66BABF02828DB2E9A6D5D53908F2DD.

⁵ Ly DP, Jena AB. Trends in Diversity and Representativeness of Health Care Workers in the United States, 2000 to 2019. JAMA Netw Open. 2021 Jul 1;4(7):e2117086.

⁶ As of August 15, 2025, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Health Resources and Services Administration, and the National Institutes of Health have faced challenges that will negatively impact Black communities.