

# DENTAL ASSISTANT APPRENTICESHIP

## STATE STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT THE DENTAL CARE WORKFORCE IN HEALTH CENTERS



### TRAIN

Federally Registered Apprenticeships for Health Center Dental Assistant Training



#### ORGANIZATION

**MICHIGAN PRIMARY CARE ASSOCIATION**

#### LOCATION

**LANSING,  
MICHIGAN**

#### HEALTH CENTERS IN STATE

**45**

### STATE POLICY LEVER

State's decision for employers to work directly with the federal government for Registered Apprenticeships inspired the State's Primary Care Association to assist health centers as an intermediary. State funding for employer-based training is an incentive.

### SUCCESS FACTORS

- Relationships with local workforce development boards were developed to access supplemental funding for apprentices

### POSITIVE OUTCOMES:

- In early implementation at least four apprentices have completed the program

### THE CHALLENGE

After experiencing shortages of dental assistants (DAs), Michigan health centers wanted to establish United States Department of Labor (USDOL) registered apprenticeship (RA) programs to support health center-based DA training and DA recruitment. However, RA program development and approval was considered an excessive administrative challenge for each health center.

### STATE POLICY/STRATEGY

RAs are federally recognized on-the-job training programs that provide employees with free training toward a nationally recognized credential. There are two state approaches for registering and overseeing federal RAs: 1) Office of Apprenticeship, where employers/providers/trainers work directly with state assigned USDOL staff for RA registration and management; and 2) State Apprenticeship Agencies, where a state-based agency is federally authorized to work directly with local contacts to support RA registration and reporting.

Michigan is an "Office of Apprenticeship" state, requiring interested RA program sponsors to work directly with USDOL staff for RA program guidance and approval. The USDOL Michigan team of Apprenticeship Training Representatives work directly with RA program sponsors and apprentices in Michigan. In lieu of each health center developing its own training and undergoing the federal process for RA application and reporting, the Michigan Primary Care Association (MPCA) stepped forward to serve as the RA Program Sponsor and works with the USDOL and individual health centers on implementation. This approach removes the

administrative burden on individual health centers to manage apprenticeship-related application and compliance activities.

### STATE POLICY/STRATEGY IN ACTION

MPCA took ownership over all steps necessary to develop an RA program for dental assistants. MPCA's Program was approved by the federal Office of Apprenticeship in January 2023. ([https://www.apprenticeship.gov/partner-finder/listings?id=sponsor\\_2023-MI-117014](https://www.apprenticeship.gov/partner-finder/listings?id=sponsor_2023-MI-117014)) MPCA makes the DA training available to all health centers in the state, provides technical assistance in its implementation and support of federal reporting of outcomes data. Additionally, MPCA assumes the role of submitting all data to the U.S. Department of Labor through their Registered Apprenticeship Partners Information Data System (RAPIDS). The RA program is one of many under MPCA's Health Center Careers Training Program initiative. MPCA has several staff that support this initiative, including a coordinator, specialist, director, and officer. Under the MPCA DA RA Program, individuals are hired by health centers as staff and trained as DAs while receiving a wage and benefits.



PHOTO SOURCE: INTERCARE COMMUNITY HEALTH NETWORK COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

MPCA was awarded \$8 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to support the development of this RA program. Of

that, one portion is retained at MPCA for program support (including for the DA apprenticeship). Another portion is distributed to health centers to offset training costs, wages, and supplies (not exclusive to DA training). Since the current funding source will expire in 2026, MPCA is exploring alternate funding options through similar state-supported opportunities. The RA program also has access to supplemental state and federal funding opportunities through local workforce development boards, such as Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding. These supplemental funds can be used to support apprentices in wraparound services (such as transportation, books/supplies, childcare, etc.) or employer wage support.

### THE IMPACT

The first class of DA apprentices graduated four dental assistants in June 2023. MPCA's apprenticeship for DAs is only a portion of the training support provided by the Health Center Careers Training Program. Several other initiatives are in place to support health center-based training, and the DA apprenticeship program is an important complement to the workforce development initiatives already underway. Under the Health Center Careers Training Program, there have been 277 participants, of which nearly 94% have graduated.

*“This innovative approach assists health centers with growing their workforce and ultimately expanding access to care. Our health center members are drivers of economic development in their local communities by creating and employing a diverse workforce that represents the communities they serve.”*

RACHEL RUDDOCK, DIRECTOR OF WORKFORCE AND CAREER TRAINING, MPCA