

EXPANDED FUNCTION DENTAL ASSISTANTS

STATE STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT THE DENTAL CARE WORKFORCE IN HEALTH CENTERS



MAXIMIZE

Training and Deploying Expanded Function Dental Assistants to Enhance Impact



ORGANIZATION

SHAWNEE HEALTH SERVICE AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

LOCATION

CARTERVILLE, ILLINOIS

PATIENT

VOLUME (2022)
32,844

STATE POLICY LEVER

Following completion of required training, EFDAs can perform an expanded set of dental services in a health center

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Tiered training tied to tiered wages
- Administrative and clinical staff structured to support DA program implementation and training
- Repayment contracts to offset training costs

POSITIVE OUTCOMES:

- Stabilized EFDA workforce
- Additional 88 dental appointments per week, resulting in additional \$10,120 of weekly profit opportunities (beyond dentistry) for dental staff

THE CHALLENGE

Shawnee Health Service and Development Corporation (Shawnee Health) experienced substantial staffing challenges among expanded function dental assistants (EFDAs) post-COVID-19, in part due to the closure of local EFDA training programs. These staffing shortages threatened their ability to provide dental services in a timely fashion and resulted in lower service capacity upon re-opening.

STATE POLICY/STRATEGY

Illinois state policy outlines a scope of practice for EFDAs. These provisions permit EFDAs to perform dental impressions, dental restorations placement, coronal scaling, and monitoring of nitrous oxide anesthesia (among other services) while under the supervision and authorization of a dentist. Illinois has several pathways for dental assistants (DAs) to qualify as EFDAs.

STATE POLICY/STRATEGY IN ACTION

To address their DA shortages and expand dental services, Shawnee Health developed and implemented a pathway for training EFDAs. The Shawnee Health Dental Assistant Apprenticeship Program (DA Training Program) is a three-tiered training program which allows the Apprentice to be trained on-the-job by a Dental Assisting National Board (DANB)-certified mentor; learn while earning a full-time salary; and simultaneously complete a 240-hour (6-month) online educational program. See the Table below for additional information about these training tiers.

DA Training	Level Associated Requirements
Tier I	240-hour (6-month) online educational training program; Infection Control and Radiation Health and Safety portions of the DANB Certification Exam
Tier II	Nitrous oxide sedation monitoring, coronal polishing, and sealant training and certifications
Tier III	3,500 chairside clinical assisting hours (approximately two years) and passing the chairside DANB exam

Shawnee Health has established policies and procedures to maximize the retention of trainees, through strategic interviewing for mission match, establishing a training program repayment contract (i.e. requiring repayment of the health center's training cost investment if the trainee leaves the organization before a certain time period), and salary increases associated with each training tier. However, a challenge with this approach is the amount of time required for EFDA certification. With the entire DA Training Program taking more than two years to complete, the Apprentices can only provide basic DA services until they complete all training tiers. Shawnee Health feels the benefits received from retention, satisfaction among Apprentices, and the additional tier of services provided by EFDA graduates are worth the tradeoff.

Numerous health center staff have supported the DA Training Program:

- Legal counsel develops apprenticeship applications and repayment agreements.
- Human resources oversee apprentice hiring and registration with the federal Department of Labor (DOL).
- One EFDA serves as primary instructor and academic coordinator to ensure Apprentices receive sufficient clinic hours.
- Other EFDAs provide chairside supervision and mentoring to Apprentices.

Additionally, Shawnee Health's DA Training Program is a federal Department of Labor registered apprenticeship through its Program Sponsor Man-Tra-Con Corporation. Shawnee Health's partnership with Man-Tra-Con Corporation gives it access to grant funding, which currently enables partial coverage (~50% for 6 months) of Apprentice wages during training and access to wraparound services.

THE IMPACT

The DA workforce has been stabilized as a result of the program. Since the DA Training Program began, Shawnee Health has not had to seek applicants for their EFDA positions outside of graduated Apprentices. Although the requirement for 3,500 clinical hours to

receive DANB Certification seems excessive, once certification is acquired for Nitrous Oxide monitoring and child prophylaxis and sealants, the Apprentices can effectively provide those services for patients prior to getting their DANB Certification. Everyone "working to the highest level of their certification" has allowed Shawnee Health to increase hygiene access for more difficult procedures such as Periodontal Root Scaling and Planning and Full Mouth Debridement, because the EFDA staff are able to perform the prophies for children. Additionally, by staffing two EFDAs for four days per week, they have been able to add an additional 88 re-care and prophylaxis appointments per week. This has increased their weekly revenue by more than \$10,000. Dentist staff are supportive of the DA Training Program because the EFDAs training and competency far exceeds the competency of staff recruited externally.



EXPANDED FUNCTION DENTAL ASSISTANT | SOURCE: SHAWNEE HEALTH SERVICE AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION, 2024

“The success of the DA training program has enabled our clinics to return to full capacity, as well as expand access. During a 12-month period, the Apprentices served approximately 1,800 patients. To date, we have enrolled seven Apprentices in the program. The first two have fulfilled the 3,500-hour clinical experience requirement and are scheduled to take the DANB General Chairside Assistant Exam. Apprenticeship is a proven model for developing a skilled workforce. Our success is attributed to our model: ‘Everyone works to the highest level of their certification/license.’”

DI RILEY, CHIEF DIRECTOR OF CLINICAL SERVICES