

STATE FUNDING for TRAINING

STATE STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT THE DENTAL CARE WORKFORCE IN HEALTH CENTERS



TRAIN

Leveraging State Funds to Train Dental Assistants in an Indiana Health Center



ORGANIZATION

HEALTHLINC, INC.

LOCATION

**VALPARAISO,
INDIANA**

PATIENT

VOLUME (2022)
42,083

STATE POLICY LEVER

Workforce development funding to support employer-based training

SUCCESS FACTORS

- Building relationships with local Workforce Development Board for training program design in alignment with state incentives
- Recruiting patients for open staff positions

POSITIVE OUTCOMES:

- DA training program is now planning its 5th cohort, having graduated 14 DAs through this training already
- \$50,000 received since 2022 in state workforce funding to support DA training and staff retention

THE CHALLENGE

HealthLinc, Inc. (HealthLinc) experienced a persistent shortage of dental assistants (DAs). It was cost prohibitive for the health center to pay for staff training or provide their own training without financial support. Leveraging state funds was essential to address their dental workforce development needs.

STATE POLICY/STRATEGY

Federal funding to support professional skills development is available to state labor/workforce agencies through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and can be directed to the dental workforce. State workforce agencies prioritize occupations for training support funding in their respective state workforce plans. In Indiana, a WIOA initiative referred to as Next Level Jobs is led by the Indiana Department of Workforce Development. Through this initiative, jobseekers can receive free training for certain high-demand jobs (Workforce Ready Grants), and employers can receive stipends of up to \$5,000 per employee for up-skilling their workforce in priority jobs (Employer Training Grant). DA is a state-prioritized occupation, enabling jobseekers and employers to be eligible for funding to support this role.

STATE POLICY/STRATEGY IN ACTION

HealthLinc developed a DA training program that leverages the state's Employer Training Grant stipend. The local Workforce Development Board (board) provided insight into training design elements and strategies

to access Employer Training Grant funds. The four-month long training program is an Indiana Department of Health Approved program. HealthLinc hires inexperienced DA jobseekers as staff trainees. They receive an entry-level wage and benefits package and participate in the on-site training. Upon completion of their courses and dental radiography state certification, graduates are promoted to DAs.

HealthLinc has committed staff resources to develop and administer the training program. This includes an experienced DA who works with the Chief Dental Officer to design the curriculum and serve as the primary instructor.

HealthLinc covers all costs for the DA training which are estimated to be \$7,350 per trainee. Costs include program fees, textbook, equipment, CPR Certification, immunizations, student membership to the American Dental Assistant Association and Dental Radiography examination. The Employer Training Grant stipend is \$5,000 per employee for up to ten employees per year.



DENTAL ASSISTANT TRAINING PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS | SOURCE: HEALTHLINC, INC. 2024

THE IMPACT

HealthLinc has trained four cohorts (16 students) and graduated 14 DAs. Some DA trainees were recruited from the health center's patient population. Planning for

a fifth cohort of DA trainees is currently underway. Although they have seen a 43% retention rate for staff trained (6 DA retained) in their on-the-job training programs, a formal retention evaluation has not been done specific to DAs. However, since implementing this training program, HealthLinc has been able to provide uninterrupted dental services at all five of its dental offices throughout this volatile job market. Each dental assistant vacancy represents a 35% reduction in each dentist's capacity to care for their patients, so this type of program is essential for patient care.

“Through our program, 14 dental assistants have entered the dental workforce, enabling approximately 10,000 patient visits over a span of two and a half years. Their influence reaches beyond statistics, enhancing lives with every smile they help to care for.”

MELISSA MITCHELL, CEO, HEALTHLINC