

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

POSITIVE OUTCOMES:

- DA training program is planning its 5th cohort, having already graduated 13 DAs
- \$55,000 received since 2022 in state workforce funding to support DA training and staff retention

THE CHALLENGE

HealthLinc, Inc. (HealthLinc) has experienced a persistent shortage of dental assistants (DAs) over the past few years. Without financial support, it was cost-prohibitive for the health center to pay for staff training or provide its own training. Leveraging state funds was essential to address its 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 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, job seekers can receive free training for specific 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). The DA role is a state-prioritized occupation, enabling job seekers 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. The local Workforce Development Board provided insight into training design elements and strategies to access Employer

Training Grant funds. HealthLinc's four-month training program offers on-the-job training, and the dental radiology course is approved through the Indiana Department of Health. HealthLinc seeks candidates with little to no prior experience in dental assisting and offers hands-on training at HealthLinc's dental clinics. Trainees gain the knowledge and skills needed to excel in patient care and dental radiology. The dental assistant trainees are hired as full-time employees and are paid an entry-level wage with a competitive benefits package. Upon successful completion of the program, including obtaining their radiology license, graduates are promoted to dental assistants and placed to work at one of HealthLinc's dental clinics if there is an opening.

HealthLinc has committed dedicated resources to developing and administering this program. An experienced dental educator, in collaboration with HealthLinc's Chief Dental Officer, has carefully crafted the curriculum to meet industry standards and ensure participants receive top-tier training. The dental educator also serves as the program's primary instructor, providing trainees with in-depth, hands-on guidance throughout the course.

HealthLinc covers most costs for the DA training, which are estimated to be \$7,350 per trainee. Costs include expenses such as program fees, equipment, CPR Certification, immunizations, student membership to the American Dental Assistant Association and the Dental radiology 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 13 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 HealthLinc has seen a 43% retention rate for staff trained (6 DAs retained) in their on-the-job training programs, a formal retention evaluation has not been done specifically for DAs. However, since implementing this training program, HealthLinc has provided uninterrupted dental services at all five dental clinics throughout this volatile job market. Each dental assistant vacancy represents a 35% reduction in the dentist's capacity to care for their patients, so this type of program is essential for patient care.

“Through our program, 13 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