

Senate Workforce Development Committee

Senator Mike Wobbema, Chair

February 13, 2025

SB 2217



Chairman Wobbema and members of the Workforce Development Committee,

My name is Maggie Seamands and I am the Executive Director of the North Dakota Professional Health Program, Inc. (NDPHP). I would like to share with you information about the scope and role of our program as well as information about the prevalence of substance use and mental health disorders for Dentists.

The NDPHP is a 503 (c)(3) with a mission to promote safety and care to improve the health and well-being of healthcare professionals by offering them support. We do this through the facilitation of rehabilitation of those health care providers who have physical or mental conditions that could compromise public safety and help to monitor the professional's recovery journey. Currently, the NDPHP is serving physicians, physician assistants, medical residents, doctors of osteopathy, naturopath, and genetic counselors who are practicing or licensed by the State Board of Medicine. SB 2217 would allow us to extend our services to Dentists and Dental Hygienist as well.

Healthcare professionals in our state are prone to mental health and substance use disorders at the same rate as the general population; 1 in 10. Research by the National Occupational Mortality Surveillance continues to support that suicide rates are higher among Dentist and Medical Doctors than other professions ranking number 1 and 2. Substance use disorders also impact health care providers at the same rate of 10-15% as the general population. With 493 actively licensed dentists and 413 of them working in the state of ND this would represent approximately 41 – 63 Dentist with a potential substance use disorder in our state.

North Dakota Professional Health Program

The NDPHP creates a safe and confidential space for these professionals to seek out assistance for burnout, mental health, or substance use disorders. We do this by working with the professional to evaluate their needs and then help them find resources for treatments and assessments. Once completed the assessments from their treating providers are shared back to the NDPHP who will then help create an individualized monitoring plan. These plans include things such as a mentor, AA/NA self-help meetings, monitoring or workplace oversight, an executive coach, therapy, drug screening and/or breathalyzers. The NDPHP then follows the professional's recovery journey to help ensure accountability. The NDPHP has great success with approximately 80% of the professionals coming into the program voluntarily, rather than being ordered to do so by their licensing board. Seeking assistance or support proactively allows the professional a better opportunity to stay in practice safely while being monitored in the programming.

The professional or licensee is responsible for the cost of the assessment and treatment and in most situations use their private medical insurance to help pay for these costs. The cost of individual treatment is not paid by the Board of Dentistry or the NDPHP. Those who participate in the NDPHP do pay a fee that assists in the cost of program operations. As collaborative efforts continue with the NDPHP and Board of Dentistry, additional funding opportunities through grants are being explored.

In summary, the language in SB2217 will allow for a collaborative partnership between the NDPHP and Board of Dentistry giving licensed individuals by the board an opportunity to confidentially seek out treatment services, advocacy, and assistance with their mental health and substance use disorders.

Thank you for your time and attention to SB 2217.

North Dakota Professional Health Program