



# North Dakota Legislative Council

Prepared for the Health Care Committee  
LC# 27.9170.01000  
February 2026

## DENTAL SCHOOL - EDUCATION, WORKFORCE, AND FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS

This memorandum provides a summary of the factors evaluated by states when considering establishing a dental school.

### DENTAL EDUCATION AVAILABLE IN NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota offers dental education programs at North Dakota State College of Science, Dakota College at Bottineau, and Bismarck State College. North Dakota State College of Science offers accredited programs, including a certificate in dental assisting, an associate degree in dental assisting, and an associate degree in dental hygiene.<sup>1</sup> Since 2016, 61 percent of the state's practicing dental hygienists graduated from the North Dakota State College of Science.<sup>2</sup> Dakota College at Bottineau has an accredited dental assisting certificate and a dental hygiene program.<sup>3</sup> Bismarck State College has been approved by the State Board of Higher Education to offer programs in dental assisting and dental hygiene, and is seeking full accreditation from the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA).<sup>4,5</sup>

Several colleges and universities in North Dakota offer predentistry programs. Predentistry programs provide dental school prerequisite classes and prepare students for admission to dental school. As of 2016, the majority of dentists working in North Dakota graduated from a dental school in Minnesota or Nebraska, with 42 percent graduating from Minnesota and 22 percent graduating from Nebraska.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Center for Rural Health, lack of availability of student seats in dental schools nationally constrains the dental workforce in North Dakota.<sup>7</sup> In the United States for the 2024-2025 academic year, 12,491 dental school applicants submitted 75,035 applications for 7,013 openings at 73 dental schools accepting first year enrollment.<sup>8</sup> The same year:

- The University of Minnesota School of Dentistry examined 360 applications and enrolled 105 first-year applicants.
- The University of Nebraska College of Dentistry examined 705 applications and enrolled 52 first-year applicants.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> North Dakota State College of Science, *Explore Dental Assisting and Hygiene*, North Dakota State College of Science, February 9, 2026, <https://ndscs.edu/dental/>.

<sup>2</sup> Center For Rural Health, *Educating the Oral Healthcare Workforce in North Dakota Factsheet*, (September 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Dakota College at Bottineau, *Programs*, Dakota College at Bottineau, February 9, 2026, <https://www.dakotacollege.edu/academics/programs>.

<sup>4</sup> Bismarck State College, *Qualified Dental Assistant*, Bismarck State College North Dakota's Polytechnic Institution February 10, 2026, <https://bismarckstate.edu/continuingeducation/business/Career-Pathways/qualifieddentalassistant/>.

<sup>5</sup> Bismarck State College, *Dental Hygiene*, Bismarck State College North Dakota's Polytechnic Institution February 10, 2026, <https://bismarckstate.edu/academics/programs/dentalhygiene/>.

<sup>6</sup> Center For Rural Health, *Educating the Oral Healthcare Workforce in North Dakota Factsheet*, (Sept. 2016).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> American Dental Association (ADA), *CODA Survey of Dental Education Series, Report 1 Academic Programs, Enrollment, and Graduates, 2024-25. Figure 2.*

<sup>9</sup> ADA, *CODA Survey of Dental Education Series, Report 1 Academic Programs, Enrollment, and Graduates, 2024-25, Figure 5b.*

Nationwide in 2024, there were 6,872 graduates from a dental school with a Doctorate of Dental Surgery or a Doctorate of Dental Medicine.<sup>10</sup>

## FEASIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Recent feasibility studies for dental schools in Texas and Georgia, and a dental therapy program in Vermont, evaluated several factors to determine whether a dental school or academic program was warranted and feasible. Evaluations considered unmet dental needs, demographic trends, the costs of establishing and maintaining an accredited dental school, student demand, and faculty recruitment and retention.

The studies used provider ratios and dental care health professional shortage area designations to assess unmet dental needs. For demographic trends, the studies considered population growth over time, aging population, and retirement rates of dentists as indicators of growing dental care demand. Financial feasibility evaluations included projected expenditures for faculty, staff, facilities, equipment, and other costs, alongside potential funding sources, like formula funding, tuition and fees, special items, donor contributions, and clinical revenue. Application and enrollment rates for various dental schools were considered to assess adequate student demand. Faculty recruitment and retention evaluations considered the ability to pay full-time faculty market salaries and the number of unfilled faculty positions.<sup>11,12,13</sup>

### North Dakota

In 2024, there were 48.33 dentists per 100,000 people and 68 dental care health professional shortage area designations in North Dakota.<sup>14,15</sup> Twelve additional practitioners are needed to eliminate the dental care health professional shortage area designations.<sup>16</sup> North Dakota's population has steadily grown since 2004, increasing by more than a thousand people per year from 2004 to 2010 and accelerating significantly to reach 796,568 in 2024.<sup>17</sup> As of 2024, individuals aged 65 and older comprise just over 17 percent of the population. As the population continues to grow and age, more dentists will be needed to address the increase in dental care needs. In 2022, the North Dakota Board of Dental Examiners determined:

- 10 percent of dentists were looking to retire in the next 5 years.
- 7 percent of dentists were looking to retire in the next 6 to 10 years.
- 10 percent were looking to retire in the next 11 to 15 years.
- 29 percent planned to retire in the next 16 years or more.<sup>18</sup>

When considering the financial feasibility of establishing a dental school in North Dakota, funding must be sufficient to develop and sustain the dental school on a continuing basis to meet accreditation requirements of CODA. The commission assesses the adequacy of financial support based on current appropriations and the stability of funding sources.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>10</sup> ADA, CODA Survey of Dental Education Series, Dental Education Program Enrollment and Graduates Trends Report: 2024-25, 2024-25, Figure 10.

<sup>11</sup> Tripp Umbach, Independent Market Feasibility, Economic Impact, Assessment, and Recommendations for Expanding the Dental Education and Workforce in Georgia, (December 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, Report on the Feasibility of a School of Dental Medicine, (August 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Office of the Vermont State Auditor, Vermont State Colleges: Dental Therapy Assessment, (June 2025)

<sup>14</sup> ADA, Health Policy Institute, Supply of Dentists, 2001-24, Figure 3.

<sup>15</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Dental Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)*, KFF (December 2024), <https://www.kff.org/other-health/state-indicator/dental-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

<sup>17</sup> ADA, Health Policy Institute, Supply of Dentists, 2001-24, Figure 2.

<sup>18</sup> Health and Human Services, North Dakota Dental Workforce, Figure 3, (2024).

<sup>19</sup> Commission of Dental Accreditation, Accreditation Standards for Dental Education Programs.

The shortage of faculty teaching general dentistry may require existing dental faculty to assume greater teaching responsibilities, limiting other opportunities for professional development. As of 2023, there were 537 unfilled full-time budgeted faculty positions in U.S. dental schools, most of which were assistant professor positions teaching general dentistry. Research from the *Journal of Dental Education* indicates the top four barriers for faculty recruitment and retention are: inadequate financial compensation, heavy workload, poor work environment, and burnout.<sup>20</sup>

## RECENTLY ESTABLISHED DENTAL SCHOOLS

### Ohio

Northeast Ohio Medical University Bitonte College of Dentistry was established, received initial accreditation, and accepted applications for its inaugural class in 2024.<sup>21</sup> The university offers a Doctorate of Dental Surgery.<sup>22</sup> In 2021, the university engaged an external advisory board to conduct a dental school feasibility study.<sup>23</sup> Information presented by the president of the university to the board of trustees and testimony provided by the university to the Ohio General Assembly during the 2021-22 legislative session indicated the rationale for creating the school was based on dental workforce shortages and the high number of dental professional shortage area designations in the state.<sup>24,25</sup> As of 2024, Ohio had 48.70 dentists per 100,000 people.<sup>26</sup> In 2024, there were 164 dental healthcare professional shortage area designations.<sup>27</sup> An additional 325 dental practitioners would be required to eliminate the shortage area designations.<sup>28</sup>

The Ohio General Assembly earmarked \$1 million in state funding for the dental school in the 2022-23 budget.<sup>29</sup> Northeast Ohio Medical University also received a \$10 million philanthropic gift from the Bitonte Family Foundation to support the creation of the school.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the school received \$2 million in congressionally directed federal funding in the fiscal year 2023 budget for construction of the dental school.<sup>31</sup> For the 2023-24 budget, the Ohio General Assembly appropriated \$4 million for the dental school.<sup>32</sup> The overall cost for constructing the school was \$25 million.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>20</sup> J.S. Holtzman, J.T. Ungard, J. Wies, and P. Jung, HRSA's Role in the Academic Oral Health Workforce, Vol. 10, SJ, (2025).

<sup>21</sup> Northeast Ohio Medical University, *Timeline*, The Pulse February 10, 2026, <https://www.neomed.edu/dentistry/about/timeline/>.

<sup>22</sup> Northeast Ohio Medical University, *The Bitonte College of Dentistry*, The Pulse, February 10, 2026, <https://www.neomed.edu/dentistry/>.

<sup>23</sup> Northeast Ohio Medical University, *Developing NEOMED's Newest College*, The Pulse February 10, 2026, <https://www.neomed.edu/ignite-winter-2025/newest-college/>.

<sup>24</sup> Northeast Ohio Medical University, *board of trustees approves pursuit of dental college*, The Pulse, September 26, 2022, <https://thepulse.neomed.edu/articles/board-of-trustees-approves-pursuit-of-dental-college/>.

<sup>25</sup> Testimony of John Langell, President of Northeast Ohio Medical University Bitonte College of Dentistry, Hearing on S.B. No. 135 (2022), (March 2022).

<sup>26</sup> ADA, Health Policy Institute, Supply of Dentists, 2001-24, Figure 3.

<sup>27</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Dental Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)*, KFF (December 2024), <https://www.kff.org/other-health/state-indicator/dental-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22collid%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> H.B. 110, 134<sup>th</sup> Assembly. (2021)

<sup>30</sup> Northeast Ohio Medical University, *NEOMED receives \$10 million commitment from Bitonte Family Foundation to establish a College of Dentistry*, The Pulse, September 29, 2022. <https://www.neomed.edu/news/neomed-receives-10-million-commitment-from-bitonte-family-foundation-to-establish-a-college-of-dentistry/>.

<sup>31</sup> United States Senate Committee on Appropriations, *Congressionally Directed Spending Requests FY2023*, United States Senate Committee on Appropriations, February 10, 2026, <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/congressionally-directed-spending-requests-fy2023-chart>.

<sup>32</sup> H.B. 33, 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. (2023)

<sup>33</sup> Denise Dick, *New Dental College Will Fill a Need in Ohio*, The Business Journal, (April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025), <https://businessjournaldaily.com/new-dental-college-will-fill-a-need/>.

### Texas

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso-Hunt School of Dentistry was established in 2021 and received initial accreditation from CODA.<sup>34,35</sup> The university offers a Doctorate of Dental Medicine.<sup>36</sup> The 2018 *Texas Tech University Health Sciences El Paso School of Dental Medicine Report on the Feasibility of a School of Dental Medicine* concluded there was a severe shortage of dentists in the El Paso region and, due to the lack of nearby dental colleges, the region would not benefit from increased graduation rates at other Texas dental schools. The report further concluded, based on applicant and enrollment rates in Texas, there was adequate student demand for another dental school to be established in Texas, and the institution had the necessary resources to establish and sustain an accredited program.<sup>37</sup>

In its 2019 legislative request, the university noted Texas ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> in the nation in the number of practicing dentists per 100,000 people, and as the population increased, pre-existing dental care health professional shortage area designations such as El Paso County would face increasing challenges.<sup>38</sup> As of 2024, there were 53.34 dentists per 100,000 people and 261 dental care health professional shortage area designations.<sup>39,40</sup> An additional 368 dental care practitioners would be needed to eliminate the shortage areas.<sup>41</sup> In 2017, the Texas Legislature appropriated \$8 million to begin planning and establishing the dental school.<sup>42</sup> In 2019, the Texas Legislature approved \$20 million for the dental school and in 2021, provided \$59 million in capital funding to the dental school. The dental school was estimated to cost \$180 million.<sup>43</sup>

### Washington

Pacific Northwest University School of Dental Medicine was established and accredited in 2024 and received its first class of students in 2025.<sup>44</sup> The university offers programs in Doctor of Dental Medicine, Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, Doctor of Physical Therapy, Master of Arts in Medical Sciences, and Master of Science in Occupational Therapy.<sup>45</sup> In testimony provided to the Washington State House Health Care and Wellness Committee, the university noted dentists were distributed unevenly across the

<sup>34</sup> Texas Tech Health El Paso, *Milestone Achievement at Hunt School of Dental Medicine*, Texas Tech Health El Paso, September 18, 2024, <https://www.ttuhscimpact.org/post/milestone-achievement-at-hunt-school-of-dental-medicine>.

<sup>35</sup> Texas Tech Health El Paso, *Accreditation and Approval*, February 10, 2026, <https://ttuhsc.edu/sdm/accreditation.aspx>.

<sup>36</sup> Texas Tech Health El Paso, *Programs WLHSDM*, Texas Tech Health El Paso, February 10, 2026, <https://catalog.ttuhsc.edu/content.php?catoid=1&navoid=11>.

<sup>37</sup> Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, *Report on the Feasibility of a School of Dental Medicine*, (August 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, *Legislature Request*.

<sup>39</sup> American Dental Association, Health Policy Institute, *Supply of Dentists, 2001-24*, Figure 3.

<sup>40</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Dental Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)*, KFF (December 2024), <https://www.kff.org/other-health/state-indicator/dental-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22collid%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>.

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, *Report on the Feasibility of a School of Dental Medicine*, (August 2018).

<sup>43</sup> Jewél Jackson, *El Paso universities set to receive millions from Texas Legislature for campus construction projects*, El Paso Matters, October 20, 2021, <https://elpasomatters.org/2021/10/20/el-paso-universities-set-to-receive-millions-from-texas-legislature-for-campus-construction-projects/>.

<sup>44</sup> Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences, *Fast Facts - School of Dental Medicine*, Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences, February 10, 2026, [https://www.pnwu.edu/about/fast-facts-university/fast-facts-school-of-dental-medicine/#:~:text=Fast%20Facts%20%E2%80%93%20School%20of%20Dental%20Medicine&text=PNWU%27s%20School%20of%20Dental%20Medicine,Dental%20Medicine%20\(DMD\)%20degree](https://www.pnwu.edu/about/fast-facts-university/fast-facts-school-of-dental-medicine/#:~:text=Fast%20Facts%20%E2%80%93%20School%20of%20Dental%20Medicine&text=PNWU%27s%20School%20of%20Dental%20Medicine,Dental%20Medicine%20(DMD)%20degree).

<sup>45</sup> Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences, *Admissions*, Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences, February 10, 2026, <https://www.pnwu.edu/admissions/>.

state, with rural areas and medically underserved communities most affected.<sup>46</sup> In addition, testimony to the Washington State Senate Committee on Health and Long-Term Care, the university noted the state had been losing dentists through retirement and relocation and the university was created to address the statewide dental workforce shortage.<sup>47</sup> As of 2024, Washington had 70.33 dentists per 100,000 people.<sup>48</sup> In 2024, there were 188 dental care health professional shortage area designations in the state.<sup>49</sup> An additional 194 dental practitioners would be needed to eliminate the shortage areas.<sup>50</sup> Pacific Northwest University School of Dental Medicine received \$5 million from the Washington Legislature through the 2023-25 capital budget as a dental capacity grant.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, the university received a \$12 million grant from Delta Dental of Washington.<sup>52</sup>

### PRIOR STUDIES

House Concurrent Resolution No. 3023 (2003) provided for a study of the desirability and feasibility of establishing a regional dental school within the North Dakota University System in conjunction with the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry.<sup>53</sup> The resolution cited concerns regarding the reduced student application pool to dental schools across the country, North Dakota's number of practicing dentists, the number of counties designated as dental care health professional shortage areas, and an aging dentist population within the state.<sup>54</sup> The resolution was not prioritized for study.

---

<sup>46</sup> Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences, *State of Washington House Healthcare and Wellness Committee Speech: Dr. Michael Lawler, President of PNWU*, Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences, February 10, 2026, <https://www.pnwu.edu/blog/2024/01/30/do-day-2024/>.

<sup>47</sup> S.B. 5113, Reg. Sess. 2023.

<sup>48</sup> ADA, Health Policy Institute, Supply of Dentists, 2001-24, Figure 3.

<sup>49</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, *Dental Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)*, KFF (December 2024), <https://www.kff.org/other-health/state-indicator/dental-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>.

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> Washington State Fiscal Information, *Prior Capital Budget Proposals*, February 10, 2025, <https://fiscal.wa.gov/statebudgets/2023proposals/hc2325bien>.

<sup>52</sup> Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences, *PNWU Begins Construction on one of the Country's "Most Innovative" Dental Schools*, Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences, February 10, 2026, <https://www.pnwu.edu/blog/2023/10/26/delta-dental-equity-hall-groundbreaking/>.

<sup>53</sup> HCR 3023, 58<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly. (2003)

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*