

## **Delta Dental Community Care Foundation Expands its Multi-Year Senior Oral Health Partnership Program to Mississippi Delta Region**

Four organizations – Delta Health Center, Delta Health System, Mississippi State Office of Oral Health and Bolivar County Council on Aging, Inc. – receive a \$5 million grant to work together to improve access to quality oral health care for underserved seniors

SAN FRANCISCO – May 21, 2025 – The Delta Dental Community Care Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Delta Dental of California and affiliates (Delta Dental), today announced the addition of a fourth partnership to its [Senior Oral Health Partnership Program](#). The new collaboration brings together [Delta Health Center](#) — a historic Federally Qualified Health Center — along with [Delta Health System](#), the [Mississippi State Office of Oral Health](#), and [Bolivar County Council on Aging, Inc.](#) to join forces with the Community Care Foundation to serve older adults living in rural areas through increased access and resources.<sup>1</sup> This grant is part of Delta Dental’s commitment to senior oral health, which includes more than \$20 million in philanthropic giving dedicated to senior oral health initiatives through the Community Care Foundation.

According to [U.S. Census](#) projections, older adults aged 65 and older will outnumber children for the first time in U.S. history by 2034. A [Delta Dental survey](#) revealed that 80% of older American adults don’t go to the dentist as often as recommended, and access is one of the main barriers.

Since its launch in April 2022, the Senior Oral Health Partnership Program aims to transform how vulnerable seniors access quality oral health care by investing in strategic community partnerships. By forming and funding local collaborations, the program supports the development of innovative approaches and expansion of oral health services. Insights collected by the partnerships regarding community needs and successes are used to identify effective solutions and inform the Senior Oral Health Care Model. Oral health is directly linked to overall health, and by supporting the providers at these organizations through partnership, Delta Dental is working to bridge critical gaps in care and help more patients receive the oral health care they need.

The need in the Mississippi Delta is especially urgent. More than half (55%) of the seniors in the region experience severe tooth loss and 25% of older adults are missing teeth, with 20% of older adults in the area living below the federal poverty level. This new partnership plans to expand clinical capacity in the region, provide comprehensive mobile services and transportation, and implement education and policy advocacy for improved oral health outcomes among rural seniors.

“Less than 10% of adults in Mississippi Delta counties report that they have seen a dentist in the past 12 months – considerably lower than 64% nationally,” said Robin Boyles, chief program planning and development officer at Delta Health Center. “We at Delta Health Center unfortunately see high rates of dental disease among our seniors. These dental issues impact their health, nutrition, mental health, and socialization. We are excited about this new partnership, which will help us better serve the seniors in our communities, and are grateful to the Delta Dental Community Care Foundation for their support.”

“We are excited to be part of this partnership to improve the overall health and well-being of seniors in the Mississippi Delta,” said Veronica Gates, public health specialist for the Mississippi State Department

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<sup>1</sup> Delta Dental of California and affiliates is collaborating with Delta Health Center and Delta Health System, two organizations based in the Mississippi Delta region, but they are not affiliates of Delta Dental of California.

of Health, Office of Oral Health. “Our efforts in oral health surveillance provide evidence of trends, identify high-risk populations, and inform our public health interventions. As a member of the Senior Oral Health Partnership Program, we look forward to collaborating with Delta Health Center, Delta Health System, and Bolivar County Council on Aging, Inc. to utilize this tool and to establish programs to improve health equity and access to oral health care, particularly in minority communities.”

“This partnership helps us better understand the unique needs of rural communities,” said Kenzie Ferguson, vice president of foundation and corporate social responsibility for Delta Dental of California and affiliates. “In places like the Mississippi Delta, the dentist often serves as the main provider of preventive care. By expanding access and investing in community-led solutions, we’re addressing gaps and reimagining how oral health can drive overall health in rural areas.”

Existing partners from Washington, D.C., [Howard University College of Dentistry](#) and [Mary’s Center](#); Santa Cruz County, [Dientes Community Dental Care](#) and [Salud Para La Gente](#); and San Diego, a consortium of nine partners led by [Health Quality Partners of Southern California](#), have served more than 13,000 senior patients through the Senior Oral Health Partnership Program to date. These senior patients receive comprehensive, ongoing care and establish a dental home.

One of those senior patients is Caroline Bryant, a 67-year-old retired, disabled stroke survivor, who urgently needed partial dentures. Despite her Medicare coverage, Caroline’s insurance did not extend to dental treatments, leaving her in a difficult predicament. She discovered Mary’s Center in 2023 through her friend who benefited from the Senior Oral Health Partnership Program. Caroline said, “There are no other programs out there that assist seniors with dental care,” expressing her relief and gratitude. Caroline travels nearly two hours to attend her appointments at Mary’s Center; she has received a cleaning, several fillings, and her partial dentures.

#### **About Delta Dental Community Care Foundation**

The Delta Dental Community Care Foundation is the philanthropic arm of Delta Dental of California and its affiliated companies including Delta Dental Insurance Company, Delta Dental of Pennsylvania and Delta Dental of New York, Inc. Since 2011, the Community Care Foundation has awarded more than \$170 million in funding and support to increase access to quality dental care, oral health education, and to advance scientific research across the company’s 15-state service area and the District of Columbia. For more information about the Delta Dental Community Care Foundation, please visit <https://www1.deltadentalins.com/foundation.html>

#### **About Delta Dental of California and affiliates**

Since 1955, Delta Dental of California and affiliates has offered comprehensive, high-quality oral health care coverage to millions of enrollees and built the strongest network of dental providers in the country. The Delta Dental of California enterprise includes its affiliates Delta Dental Insurance Company, Delta Dental of Pennsylvania, Delta Dental of New York, Inc., as well as the national DeltaCare USA network, and provides dental benefits to more than 31 million people across 15 states and the District of Columbia.\* All are members of the Delta Dental Plans Association based in Oak Brook, Illinois, the not-for-profit national association that through a national network of Delta Dental companies collectively covers millions of people nationwide. For more information about Delta Dental of California, please visit [www.deltadentalins.com](http://www.deltadentalins.com)

\*Delta Dental of California and affiliates' operating areas encompass Alabama, California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, West Virginia and the District of Columbia, as well as Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

## **About the Mississippi Delta Partners**

### **Delta Health Center**

Founded by H. Jack Geiger and Count Gibson in 1965 as one of the nation's first Federally Qualified Health Centers, Delta Health Center encompasses 11 primary care access points including two dental clinics, and five school-based health centers. It is the only FQHC serving six counties in the Mississippi Delta, as well as the only provider of safety net oral health services in this area. The health center serves more than 14,000 patients annually with primary care services, dental preventive and restorative services, integrated behavioral health services, nutrition services, physical therapy, complementary and alternative medicine, care coordination, case management, and other services.

### **Delta Health System**

Delta Health System offers a full continuum of primary care, specialty care and inpatient care across a range of medical and surgical specialties, including advanced diagnostics, urgent/emergency services, trauma care, programs for pain management and rehabilitation, and hospice care. The hub of this system is Delta Health System – The Medical Center, a nonprofit community hospital, located in Greenville, MS.

### **Mississippi State Office of Oral Health**

A division of the Mississippi State Department of Health, the State Office of Oral Health is responsible for the prevention and control of oral diseases across the lifespan through assessment, policy and program development, surveillance, and advocacy. The State Office of Oral Health develops and implements a range of programs to address the oral health needs of Mississippians across the lifecycle in partnership with public health clinics, schools, FQHCs, and providers.

### **Bolivar County Council on Aging, Inc.**

BCCOA provides a range of transportation options both to the general public and to specialized populations, ensuring that area residents have reliable transportation to grocery stores and food pantries, congregate meal sites, dialysis centers, adult day care centers, and other needed services and supports. In its 50-year history, BCCOA has developed a host of relationships with senior-serving organizations in the Delta and knows where pockets of unmet need exist, particularly among low-income seniors and other hard-to-reach populations.

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