

Plenary: Oral Health Policy and Election Update
Speakers: Little Government Relations

This session provides a timely overview of the state and local policy landscape shaping oral health access and outcomes. Attendees will get an update on key legislative developments, Medicaid dental rates along with an analysis of recent state and local elections. This session will offer practical insights for engaging with policymakers and anticipating upcoming legislative opportunities and challenges.

Breakouts Sessions

Enhancing Patient-Centered Care with the My Dental Care Passport & Sensory Modifications Guide
Speakers: Dr. MaryAnne Lynch Small, MPH, BDS, Oral Health Kansas; Abby Richwine, RDH, BS, Oral Health Kansas; Deb Pochop, Northwest Smile Center; Billie Donohue, CDA, CPC-A, Rogers Family Dentistry; Shelley Howard, RDH, BS DH, MHSA, UMKC School of Dentistry

This session introduces two practical tools designed to help dental and healthcare teams deliver more inclusive, patient-centered care for individuals with sensory sensitivities, intellectual/developmental disabilities, or other special healthcare needs. The My Dental Care Passport offers a simple way for patients and caregivers to communicate preferences, triggers, and effective calming strategies ahead of an appointment. The Sensory Modifications Guide provides actionable strategies for adapting the clinical environment and care approach in real time. Hear from clinics and classrooms with experience using the My Dental Care Passport.

Resilience, Well-Being, and Success in the Workplace
This session addresses the growing challenges of burnout, compassion fatigue, and workforce stress within the dental profession, offering evidence-based strategies to build individual and organizational resilience. Attendees will explore practical approaches to managing stress, fostering a healthier workplace culture, and sustaining long-term well-being amid the demands of clinical practice. The session will also highlight support resources available to dental professionals, empowering attendees to take proactive steps toward a more resilient and sustainable career.

Building Your Advocacy Skills
Speaker: Little Government Relations

This session equips attendees with the foundational skills needed to become effective advocates for oral health policy at the local and state level. Participants will learn how to craft compelling messages, build relationships with legislators and stakeholders, and navigate the legislative process to advance oral health priorities. Through practical tips and real-world examples, attendees will leave with the confidence and tools to engage in advocacy efforts and make a meaningful impact on oral health policy.

Keynote Speaker
Shifting the Narrative: Amplifying Voices
Speaker: Whit Downing, Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities

Whit has a passion for advocacy and storytelling. She works for the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities. With the support from her "Dream Team," which you will learn more about in her keynote presentation, Whit is thriving in her first full-time leadership role.

After getting kicked out of dentist offices as a child, and then not going to the dentist again until the age of 26, Whit Downing's keynote will take listeners through her journey of growing in confidence and overcoming fears. The keynote session will include personal stories, poetry, and interactive audience involvement.

Understanding the importance of oral health, Whit hopes that the listeners will leave from her keynote feeling even more empowered and ready to support anxious individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities as they, too, overcome their fears of dentistry.

Plenary Sessions

AI in Dentistry
Speakers: Tatiana Y. Lin, MA, Kansas Health Institute

A systems-level look at the evidence behind AI-assisted diagnostics, what these tools mean for access, quality of care, and how policy and regulation are evolving to keep pace.

The State of Dental Practice: Costs, Insurance, and Access
Speakers: Deesha Bhaumik, PhD, American Dental Association Health Policy Institute

Dr. Bhaumik will speak about current research on the stresses dental offices face related to rising costs of supplies and staff. Learn how inflation and rising costs, insurance reimbursement, Medicaid policy, and access to care are impacting practice sustainability and the future of oral health and how we ensure dental offices have the support they need.