

Legislative Charge

Get Engaged and Commit to Our Profession

While the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) is the eyes, ears and voice of the general dentist, its representation of you and your profession are only as strong as the involvement of individual members.

Since most legislative, regulatory and third party activity that affects dentistry takes place at the local level, it's imperative that general dentists are actively engaged in the process as early as possible. This not only ensures that general dentistry's positions will be considered, but also increases the likelihood that the profession will present a single, unified response to matters being considered by state legislatures, state dental boards and third party insurers. Getting involved is as easy as knowing the legislation and regulations that exist, creating relationships with elected officials, and becoming active with your local WAGD, the WSDA and DQAC, our state dental board.

Tracking Legislation and Regulations

Most constituents have limited resources, so the Government Relations staff at AGD Headquarters keeps an eye on legislation and regulations relevant to dentistry at the state level. The AGD subscribes to State Net, an online service which monitors state legislation and regulations and provides regular updates on key terms relevant to dentistry. These are emailed to on a regular basis to our WAGD Board.

Some of the topics the AGD monitors through State Net include:

Advanced Dental Therapist/Dental Therapist	Dental Team
Children's Dental Care	Denturists
Community Dental Health Coordinator	Education Funding
Community Health Center	Fee Capping
Dental Auxiliaries	Infection Control
Dental Board	Insurance
Dental Exam	Laboratories
Dental Hygienist	Licensure
Dental Nurses	Medicaid
Dental Pilot Programs/Projects	Sedation

Staff advises local AGD leaders of key issues in their states and offers to help develop responses, write Capwiz action alerts, or determine other actions.

Engaging Members: Legislation

The WAGD, through AGD encouragement has appointed me as your legislative chair so we are aware of important issues and who can ensure that the Board is alerted to these issues. In many cases, I have served as the conduit for promoting discussion with our state dental association and other professional groups that might have a stake in the issue(s).

While many general dentists want advocacy to be a top priority of their professional associations, many individual members personally find the idea of engaging in lobbying efforts themselves more than a little intimidating. But it doesn't have to be.

Building relationships with elected officials can be as easy as:

- Participating in our state dental association's Dental Action Day, which this year will be on January 27, 2012 in Olympia and/or the AGD's annual Government Relations Conference in Washington DC
- Inviting elected officials to visit your practice. This is especially effective if you can donate to their campaign for election
- Attending your legislators' town hall meeting and asking a question or sharing a comment
- Offering to be a resource any time legislation relating to oral health is being considered
- Letting your legislator know when you support or not support actions related to our field.
- Hosting a fundraiser

Engaging Members: Regulation

Our state dental board (DQAC) may have the greatest influence on the daily practice of dentistry since it determines what the rules are for our state's practice of Dentistry. Because this agency is so important, AGD constituents are encouraged to appoint one or more liaisons to visit the Dental Commission's meetings. Any dentist is allowed to be on their distribution list for all of their activities. I learned all too well how important this is after having served on the Commission for 9 years. I used to look out at the public audience at our meetings and not see many dentists in attendance. I guess attending these meetings is sort of like watching grass grow but it is too important to be left unattended. Many of the rules in our practice act are different than they would have been, without external dentist input. I encourage everyone not to ignore this very important area.

Our WAGD liaison(s) to the state dental board would attend meetings, could present testimony on important topics, and report to the AGD constituent. Participation in these meetings ensures that general dentistry's concerns are expressed and that positions on potentially controversial issues are communicated. This can be especially critical when certain issues, such as the scope of practice for independent mid-level providers, are discussed and put to a vote.

Visibility at state dental board meetings also ensures that your constituent knows when vacancies arise, which opens the door to the possibility of getting AGD members appointed to those positions. Over the years, the AGD has seen an increase in the number of state dental boards trusting and relying on the experience and knowledge of AGD members. Many have trusted AGD members to provide expert testimony when the dental board is considering rule changes, and others have appointed AGD members to serve on boards, such as was my case. In 2009, more than 70 AGD members served on state dental boards in 36 states. Twenty-eight percent of those appointees held leadership positions (president, board chair, vice president, vice chair, secretary, and secretary/treasurer).

Get Involved

The majority of practicing dentists are general dentists, so you and your colleagues are the most affected by changes to states' dental practice acts. Get involved, stay current on legislative and regulatory activities, meet your elected officials, and be visible at state dental board hearings. Those actions will ensure that your voice—the voice of the general dentist—is heard. Contact advocacy@agd.org for more information on becoming an advocate for your profession or you can call me at any time with questions on how to get involved.

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