

Increasing the Representation of Underrepresented Minorities in the Dental Workforce to Increase Public Oral Health. Ivy Avanesian Fua, DDS

Statement of Issue: The proportion of underrepresented minorities (URM) in the dental workforce is disproportionately smaller than their proportion of the US population. Research has shown that URM dental providers are more likely to work in or near minority communities and treat minority patients. The average percentage of the population who are URM is 8.1 times greater than the percentage of URM dentists of the same ethnic group in the same area. URM dentists are also three times as likely as non-minority dentists to work in safety net or public sector settings. Under Proposition 209, which was passed in 1996 in opposition to affirmative action, CA state governmental institutions are prohibited from considering race, sex or ethnicity in the areas of public education. Although the number of URM dental students has steadily increased since 1996, it does not reflect the current US population.

Policy Recommendation:

- **Funds for grants are necessary to support research** to demonstrate that racial concordance improves health outcomes.
- **Public institutions must change their admissions policies, repeal prop 209, and look at race and ethnicity when choosing potential students.** The dental school diversity profile should reflect the US population profile in order to help reduce disparities and improve the health of the US population.

Summary: The proportion of underrepresented minorities in the dental workforce is disproportionately smaller than their proportion of the US population. Workforce diversity is necessary to improve the dental care delivery system and to address oral health care disparities. The current policy efforts to increase workforce diversity is lacking and needs change. The US Dental school enrollment and US dental workforce should resemble the diversity that is reflected in the US.

Sources: Brown LJ, Wagner KS, Johns B. Racial/ethnic variations of practicing dentists. J Am Dent Assoc. 2000; 131(12):1750–4. 17

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Elizabeth A. Mertz, Cynthia D. Wides, Aubri M. Kottek, Jean Marie Calvo and Paul E. Gates Underrepresented Minority Dentists: Quantifying Their Numbers and Characterizing The Communities They Serve. Health Affairs 35, no.12 (2016):2190-2199. doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2016.1122