

ASU, Delta Dental of Arizona collaborate on SMILE-AI program

New initiative will embed oral health education into the John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering

By Amanda Goodman, ASU News
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Arizona State University and [Delta Dental of Arizona](#) are partnering to create the Student-centered Medical Instruction and Learning in Oral Health powered by Artificial Intelligence, known as SMILE-AI, at the [John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering](#).

The initiative, made possible through a \$578,947 investment by the [Delta Dental of Arizona Foundation](#), will embed oral health education into medical school training and is expected to launch in the 2026–27 academic year, which begins in August.

“Integrating oral health into medical education is essential to preparing the next generation of physicians to deliver comprehensive, patient-centered care,” said Dr. [Sarah "Holly" Hollingsworth Lisanby](#), founding dean of the Shufeldt School. “Through SMILE-AI, we are creating an innovative, interdisciplinary learning environment that reflects how care should be delivered in the real world. This program will empower our students to better understand, prevent and treat conditions that impact both oral and systemic health.”

Upon completion of the program, it is estimated that graduates will positively impact up to 72,000 patients per class, per year.

The program will be led by [Kristen Will](#), associate dean and clinical professor at the Shufeldt School.

“SMILE-AI is designed to give medical students both the knowledge and practical skills needed to incorporate oral health into everyday clinical practice,” Will said. “By utilizing augmented intelligence and patient avatar cases, we are creating a dynamic learning experience that strengthens clinical decision-making and reinforces the importance of collaboration across disciplines. Our goal is to ensure graduates are prepared to deliver team-based care that improves outcomes for patients across diverse populations.”

The SMILE-AI program builds on Delta Dental of Arizona’s broader commitment to advancing health and wellness across the state through ["medical-dental integration"](#) and community-based

initiatives.

“Medical-dental integration is increasingly recognized as a critical driver of improved health outcomes, including those in need of chronic disease management and those facing barriers to care,” said Michael Jones, president and chief executive officer of Delta Dental of Arizona and president of the Delta Dental of Arizona Foundation. “By integrating oral health curriculum into medical education through SMILE-AI, future physicians will be better equipped to address health disparities, understand the connection between oral health and overall health, and ultimately improve the health and wellness of their patients and communities.”

The SMILE-AI program embeds oral health curricula directly into the medical school experience while also introducing augmented intelligence oral-health patient avatar cases for first- and second-year medical students. These interactive, technology-driven cases are designed to enhance clinical reasoning and provide real-world context for how oral health intersects with systemic conditions across the lifespan.

“The Delta Dental of Arizona Foundation is proud to support innovative programs like SMILE-AI that leverage science, data and technology to improve access to care and advance whole-person health,” said Barb Kozuh, executive director of the Delta Dental of Arizona Foundation. “This investment reflects our commitment to ensuring that future health care providers are prepared to deliver more integrated, equitable care.”

Arizona State University and Delta Dental of Arizona are partnering with the Harvard School of Dental Medicine Initiative to Integrate Oral Health and Medicine to develop the comprehensive curriculum. The program will emphasize team-based care and equip students with the foundational knowledge and skills needed to address oral health as a critical component of overall wellness.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



From left: Kristen Will, associate dean in ASU's John Shufeldt School of Medicine and Medical Engineering; Dr. Sarah "Holly" Hollingsworth Lisanby, founding dean of the Shufeldt School; Delta Dental of Arizona CEO Michael Jones; and Barb Kozuh, executive director of the Delta Dental of Arizona Foundation. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News