

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pilot Program Seeks to Expand Safety-Net Dental Services in North Carolina
First Cohort of Mini-Residency Participants Announced

A new program in Western North Carolina will train safety-net dentists to better care for patients with complex oral health needs. The North Carolina Oral Health Collaborative (NCOHC) and the Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC) have partnered to launch an oral surgery “mini residency” series in Spring of 2023.

On March 16, 2023, MAHEC and NCOHC announced participants in the first “mini residency” series cohort. The inaugural class includes three dentists from across North Carolina who work in Federally Qualified Health Centers, public health departments, and other safety-net oral health facilities.

The 2023 class includes:

- Dr. Blair Mirmow, [Western North Carolina Community Health Services](#) and [Smile America Partners](#)
- Dr. Mark Snelson, [Western North Carolina Community Health Services](#)
- Dr. Amanda Stroud, [AppHealth Care](#)

“We owe it to those who need affordable, accessible oral health care to help them get across the finish line, not halfway there. Many of our communities lack access to more complicated oral surgery services. This innovative initiative will enhance the skills of dental providers to serve the needs of their patients,” said Dr. Steve Cline, interim vice president of NCOHC. “There is so much potential for this program and programs like it to expand access to care, and we are so excited to be in a position to help train dentists who have dedicated their careers to service.”

While safety-net dentists are trained to offer general oral health treatment, patients who lack consistent care often need specialized services, including more complex surgeries and other procedures. Uninsured and Medicaid-insured individuals often have trouble finding options for specialist care, leading to a significant gap in the existing safety net.

Over four weekends, participating dentists in NCOHC and MAHEC's "mini residency" series will learn fundamental skills in complex oral surgery procedures, preparing them to provide a broader range of services.

NCOHC and MAHEC will evaluate the success of this pilot project, gauging potential to replicate in other regions of the state where access to oral surgery care is limited.

"It is time to create a new pathway for safety-net practitioners wanting to expand their skill set," said Dr. Katherine Jowers, chair of MAHEC's Department of Dentistry and Oral Health and associate professor of the University of North Carolina Adams School of Dentistry.

"Usually these doctors are actively practicing, and even paying off loans, so going back for a residency isn't in the cards. Providing them with a 'mini residency' in one area of practice, over a few weekends, gives them a longitudinal learning opportunity with both didactic and clinical experiences. In addition, it empowers them with skills and confidence, all while still enabling them to continue practicing and providing care to underserved North Carolinians. It promises to be a great service to providers and the public too."

This non-university accredited pilot program will take place in person at MAHEC's Biltmore Campus in Asheville, North Carolina. With this didactic and clinical training, MAHEC and NCOHC hope to provide safety-net dentists with the tools needed to enhance their competence and confidence managing complex oral health needs.

This continuing education activity has been planned and implemented in accordance with the standards of the ADA Continuing Education Recognition Program (ADA CERP) through joint efforts of MAHEC (part of [NCAHEC](#)) and the NCOHC.

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About FHLI's North Carolina Oral Health Collaborative

The [North Carolina Oral Health Collaborative](#), a program of the [Foundation for Health Leadership & Innovation](#), works to advance systems-level change, improving all North Carolinians' overall health and well-being by increasing access and equity in oral health care. NCOHC seeks to influence policy, and through collaboration, listening, and knowledge-sharing, provide maximum impact in achieving optimal oral health care for all North Carolina communities. Learn more at oralhealthnc.org and follow NCOHC on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#).

About MAHEC

Established nearly five decades ago, MAHEC – Mountain Area Health Education Center – is a leader in healthcare, education, and innovation. Headquartered in Asheville with satellite offices in [various locations](#) across its 16-county Western North Carolina service area, MAHEC is the largest of nine [Area Health Education Centers](#) in North Carolina. With more than 1,000

employees, MAHEC's mission is to recruit, train and retain the workforce needed to create a healthy North Carolina, with a focus on primary care in rural communities and those with less access to resources.

MAHEC's 14-acre Biltmore campus is also home to [UNC Health Sciences at MAHEC](#), an academic health center in partnership with UNC-Chapel Hill that includes programs from the UNC School of Medicine, UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, UNC Eshelman School of Pharmacy, and UNC Adams School of Dentistry. A private, [501\(c\)3 nonprofit organization](#), MAHEC will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2024. For more information, visit mahec.net and follow MAHEC on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

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