

*Rendering courtesy of 3D Yakima*

## **State's Second Dental School Breaks Ground in Yakima at Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences with \$12 Million Grant Support from Delta Dental of Washington**

*Innovative New Dental School Focused on Serving Rural & Underserved Communities  
to be First in Nation to Offer Students Three Years of Full-time Immersive Training at  
Community Health Centers in Tacoma, Tri-Cities and Yakima*

**YAKIMA, Wash. – Oct. 25, 2023 –** [Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences](#) (PNWU) announced \$12 million in grant funding from [Delta Dental of Washington](#) this week at a groundbreaking for an innovative new school of dental medicine focused on serving rural and other medically underserved communities which are increasingly experiencing a critical dental workforce shortage contributing to a disproportionate incidence of oral health issues.

According to a 2022 American Medical Association *Journal of Ethics* [article](#), nationally most dentists are located in urban areas, whereas only 14% of dentists practice in rural areas where 20% of the U.S. population lives.

The state's second dental school, expected to open to students in fall 2025, will train 36 dental students per year alongside PNWU health sciences students in preparation for working in collaborative and integrated healthcare environments, and which reflects the direct connection between oral and overall health. Following one year of on-campus training, PNWU will be the first dental school in the nation in which students will have three years of full-time immersive training at one of three federally qualified health centers located in [Tacoma](#), [Tri Cities](#) and [Yakima](#).

"Most dental disease is preventable, but you can't prevent oral health issues if you don't have access to care," said Delta Dental of Washington President & CEO Mark Mitchke. "As a mission-driven organization, Delta Dental of Washington is committed to growing the dental workforce particularly



#### Delta Dental of Washington

within communities of color and extending access to care for rural and underserved communities where we can make the biggest impact on improving our state's oral health."

The 30,000-square-foot state-of-the-art dental school classroom and workspace building, to be named *Delta Dental Equity Hall* in recognition of the shared commitment of PNWU and Delta Dental of Washington, aims to help increase equitable access to dental care.

"The school of dental medicine would not be a reality without the support and generosity of Delta Dental of Washington," said Dr. Panagakos. "Delta Dental Equity Hall will provide a state-of-the-art academic space for our program to train the next generation of primary care dentists focused on delivering care to the underserved in Washington, bringing oral health equity to those in need."

In addition to Delta Dental of Washington's landmark commitment -- \$2 million previously awarded and an additional \$10 million announced today -- PNWU's School of Dental Medicine has also received \$5 million in state funding with additional support from Washington State Dental Association Foundation, Pierce County, foundations and individual donors.

The PNWU grant announcement follows Delta Dental of Washington's recent \$835,000 grant to [Lake Washington Institute of Technology's](#) Dental Hygiene and Dental Assistant Education Programs, as well as a \$1.5 million lead gift to relocate [Shoreline Community College](#) Dental Hygiene Education Program -- which had been in jeopardy of closing -- to the [University of Washington School of Dentistry](#) last year. In total, Delta Dental of Washington has invested nearly \$25 million to help address the dental workforce challenge, which also includes \$2 million in previous support to [Neighborcare Health](#) Dental Education Clinic at Pacific Tower and \$1.6 million to [Providence Spokane](#) to launch a dental residency program in partnership with [Community Health Association of Spokane](#).

#### **About Delta Dental of Washington**

Founded 70 years ago by Seattle area dentists who set out to revolutionize oral health care, an innovative program was developed to provide longshoreman's children access to dental care -- and the concept of dental benefits was born. Today [Delta Dental of Washington](#), a not-for-profit, is the state's leading dental benefits provider covering nearly 4 million people statewide and beyond.

Through corporate philanthropy, oral health advocacy, and funding the [Arcora Foundation](#), Delta Dental plays a vital role in making dental care more equitable and accessible, increasing dental health education with an emphasis on youth, and expanding diversity at all levels within the dental profession. These collective efforts aim to improve oral health care in Washington so all people can enjoy good oral and overall health with no one left behind. Delta Dental of Washington is part of the Delta Dental Plans Association, consisting of 39 independent, affiliated member companies. For more information, visit: [www.deltadentalwa.com](http://www.deltadentalwa.com).

#### **About PNWU**

Pacific Northwest University of Health Sciences (PNWU) educates and trains health care professionals emphasizing service among rural and medically underserved communities throughout the Northwest.



#### Delta Dental of Washington

The grassroots, non-profit health sciences university was established in 2005 by a group of visionary community leaders in Washington's fertile Yakima Valley.



PNWU's 70-acre campus boasts a collaboration-inspiring array of health sciences disciplines, all united under the University's vision of revolutionizing community health. Featuring six active health sciences programs, including a nationally ranked College of Osteopathic Medicine, School of Physical Therapy, School of Occupational Therapy, a Master of Arts in Medical Sciences program, and Washington State University's Nursing and Pharmacy programs. PNWU's campus is abuzz with a diverse collection of healthcare professional students committed to bringing compassionate care to rural and medically underserved communities throughout the Pacific Northwest.

###

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Interviews, additional renderings, groundbreaking photos and video available upon request.

#### **ADDITIONAL QUOTES FROM THE COMMUNITY**

##### **Michael J. Lawler, PhD, MSW, President, PNWU**

*"Our shared vision for a community-based School of Dental Medicine in service to rural and underserved communities drives the PNWU-Delta Dental partnership."*

##### **Nathan Russell, DDS, President, Washington State Dental Association**

*"Currently, Washington state only trains a quarter of its dentist workforce in state. Building a new dental school in Washington creates more opportunities for our residents to be trained as dentists locally, which increases the likelihood that they will remain. Training these students in locations that will expand our dental safety net infrastructure is a win-win."*

*"PNWU will be preparing well-trained dentists who both represent their communities and who have a desire to stay in this region, and that has a tremendous potential to change the trajectory for so many people in our state that need access to quality care from highly trained dentists. The launch of PNWU is both timely and critical."*

##### **Lolinda Turner, Director of Student Success and Engagement, PNWU**

*"This historic moment demonstrates PNWU-SDM's efforts to increase oral health for rural and underserved communities in Washington state, and it will allow the school to attract dental students from and resemble all the diverse communities and provide access as dental providers who represent their community."*