



IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH

# Oral Health

# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



# Table Of Contents

A Few Words from the President .....	<b>3</b>
Annual Meeting Highlights .....	<b>4</b>
2024 Initiatives and Partnerships .....	<b>6</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ Medically Necessary Medicare Initiative</li><li>◆ Coalition for Oral Health Policy (COHP): Advancing Oral Health Policy for a More Equitable Future</li><li>◆ Promoting Primary Care Activities in Dentistry</li><li>◆ Colgate Oral Health Network &amp; SFG Live CE Webinars</li><li>◆ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine</li><li>◆ World Economic Forum</li></ul>	
Strategic Advisory Council Update .....	<b>14</b>
Membership .....	<b>16</b>
2024 SFG Partnerships .....	<b>21</b>
Member Spotlight: Celebrating Excellence in 2024 ...	<b>22</b>

# MISSION STATEMENT

The **Santa Fe Group** is a 501(c) (3), action-oriented think tank with a passion to improve lives through oral health.

Since its inception over 25 years ago, the **Santa Fe Group** has been instrumental as a neutral convener, communicator, connector and catalyst to move the needle on critical issues such as oral cancer, dental education reform, children's oral health, improved primary care access, the importance of linking medical and dental health systems, and most recently, expanding oral healthcare for our nation's seniors.



# A FEW WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

**D**ear Friends, Supporters, and Partners,

Thank you for your interest in the **Santa Fe Group**! We are grateful for the many ways in which colleagues and friends support a shared mission to promote health and wellbeing through oral health. It is through this collaborative spirit that the **Santa Fe Group** continues its efforts to bring a broader and inclusive perspective to the factors that inform and encourage healthy individuals and populations with an emphasis that full health is not complete without good oral health. Our action-oriented think tank has promoted awareness and garnered collective voice to assure the importance of oral health to overall wellbeing is no longer overlooked or disregarded. These past 12 months have been a critical time to add strength to that message and to engage with partners who are equally committed to the health of the public.

While we have accomplished much, we recognize that there is still so much more to be done. The road ahead remains challenging, but it is a journey we will continue with determination and hope. We remain deeply committed to our mission of improving health outcomes for all, and we will work tirelessly to ensure that the most vulnerable populations have access to the care and resources they deserve.

As we look ahead to the future, we remain inspired by the strength and resilience of those with whom we collaborate. I am confident that we can build on our collective successes and create even greater positive change in the years to come.

Thank you for your ongoing partnership with the **Santa Fe Group** and in this vital work. Together, we are stronger, and together, we will continue to create a healthier world for all.



Ralph Fuccillo  
President, Santa Fe Group





# ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS



# Charting Our Future Direction



**T**he celebration of our **25th anniversary** allowed us to reflect on the past and look at the landscape of the future. Partnerships with like-focused organizations have been foundational to our work and are a necessary hallmark of **SFG** for the coming years. In 2024 we created a brief overview of our future directions and strategic issues as an introduction to new and a reminder to existing partners and collaborators.

We reaffirmed our mission and the approaches we use to do our work. We highlighted our guiding stars, striving towards health equity and whole person health, realizing long term, partnership-intensive investments are needed to support progress toward these goals. Five strategic areas of focus are described to provide natural venues for collaboration, with the understanding that each area contributes to and is linked to the others. We view this overview as a living document to guide our discussions and decision-making and to be reviewed annually.



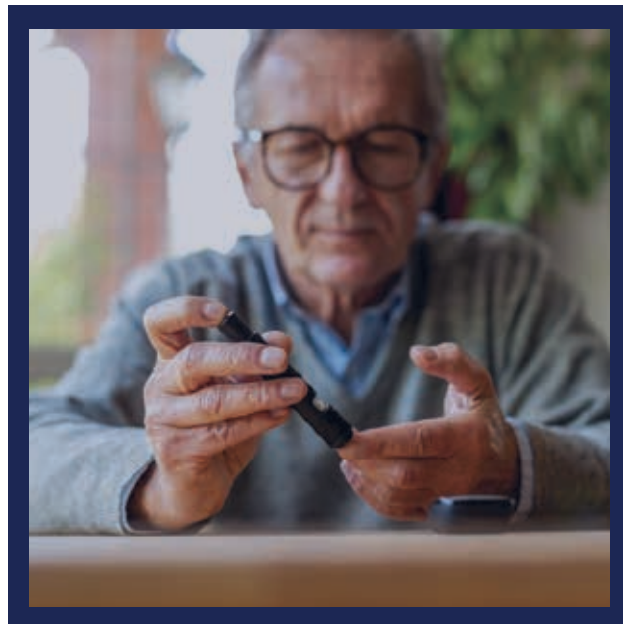


# 2024 INITIATIVES & PARTNERSHIPS



# Medically Necessary Medicare Initiative

**T**he **Santa Fe Group** continues to play a national leadership role in advancing access to dental care for the nation's older adults. SFG members, Drs. Ira Lamster, Judi Haber, Judy Jones, Mike C. Alfano, and SFG colleague, Larry Coffee, collaborated with Eric Berger and the 249-member National Consortium for Medically Necessary Oral Health Coverage to support authorization of dental services for specific medical conditions to be included in the 2026 Physician Fee Schedule. This year, we built an evidence-based clinical case for the importance of preventive dental and oral care to health outcomes in older adults with diabetes-associated retinopathy and nephropathy, the most common complications of diabetes affecting adults 65 and older, affecting 28% and 33% respectively.



The **Santa Fe Group** submitted a nomination to CMS on February 10, 2025. SFG is committed to advancing the Consortium's strategic advocacy plan that prioritizes Medicare dental benefit expansion, advocates for a feasible CMS implementation plan, obtains "success stories", and works to expand public awareness about the importance of improved access to affordable dental and oral health care on overall health and quality of life for older adults.

Ultimately our goal is to catalyze national groups across the health professions to include dental care in Part B of Medicare. Based on our previous work, on January 2023 the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) authorized payment for medically necessary dental services for older adults undergoing organ transplant surgery, cardiac valve replacement and valvuloplasty procedures, and head and neck cancers. In 2024, dental services for people with cancer related immunosuppression were authorized followed by approval for dental services for people with end stage renal disease on dialysis that went into effect in 2025.



# Coalition for Oral Health Policy (COHP): Advancing Oral Health Policy for a More Equitable Future



In 2024, the **Coalition for Oral Health Policy (COHP)** — an initiative of the **Santa Fe Group (SFG)** — continued to drive meaningful advancements in oral health policy, advocating for systemic changes to enhance access to quality dental care. To kickstart COHP's ambitious work, a Strategic Planning Retreat was held in March 2024 in Charlotte, NC, bringing together Coalition members to establish priorities and a clear direction for advocacy efforts. The retreat's summary report, outlines COHP's strategic framework and goals for the coming years. This work was made possible by a planning grant from the CareQuest Institute for Oral Health, a national leader in advancing health equity, and was facilitated by GOODSTOCK, a renowned consulting group serving organizations focused on health equity.

Later in 2024, and based on the strategic plan developed in Charlotte, COHP developed its online presence, launching a microsite within the Santa Fe Group website. This platform serves as a central hub for COHP's initiatives,

policy updates, and published work, providing a foundation for future engagement. Further expanding its national profile, COHP also played a role in raising awareness of critical oral health policy through the publication of policy statements that underscore the importance of expanding dental benefits in Medicare, and the advantages of medical-dental integration:

- “Integration of Dental and Primary Medical Care: An Unrealized Opportunity” (JAMA Internal Medicine)
- “Inclusion of Dental Services in Medicare to Improve Oral and General Health for Older Americans” (American Journal of Medicine)
- “Medicare Adult Dental Coverage: A Novel Approach” (Journal of the American Dental Association)

In addition, other policy statements/review papers are the process of development. These include:

- Dental Benefits in the Veterans Administration Program
- The Use of the Hospital Emergency Departments to Treat Non-traumatic Dental Conditions
- Dental Benefits in Medicare Advantage Programs

In October, COHP further introduced itself to a national audience through education and thought leadership, hosting a webinar in partnership with the Colgate Oral Health Network — **“Dental Services in the Medicare Program: Past, Present, and Future”**. This online event convened policymakers, healthcare professionals, and advocates to discuss the evolving landscape of Medicare dental benefits and the role of oral health in broader healthcare reforms.

As COHP continues to grow, its commitment to evidence-based advocacy, interdisciplinary collaboration, and policy-driven solutions remains steadfast. With an expanding network of partners and strategic initiatives, the Coalition is well-positioned to drive lasting policy change that ensures oral health equity for all.

Learn more about COHP’s work at [santafegroup.org/initiative-cohp](https://santafegroup.org/initiative-cohp).

# Promoting Primary Care Activities in Dentistry

**A**s a follow-up to the **2021 Santa Fe Group Salon and Continuum** series, an initiative to promote primary care activities in dentistry was created to help promote the “other side” of integrated care: integration of overall health/primary care into oral health. During 2022–2023, the SFG initiative team promoted primary care screenings through various national presentations and learned more from key stakeholder groups about potential barriers (e.g., coding, reimbursement) and solutions.



During 2024, this multi-year initiative continued its' success in several key areas:

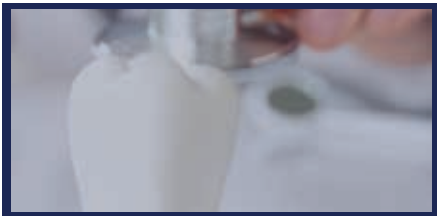
- ★ Presentations at the Harvard Initiative for Primary Care and Oral Health Symposium on Public and Private Health Integration
- ★ Additional presentations to an international audience through the Colgate Oral Health Network
- ★ Education of professional and industry leaders on the findings from key stakeholders and recommended actions
- ★ Expansion of joint lecture programs by physicians and dentists to health care professionals and payers
- ★ Proposal of multiple new CDT codes to the ADA Code Maintenance Committee (CMC) to recognize the value of expanded health care screenings as a component of oral health examinations

# Colgate Oral Health Network & SFG Live CE Webinars

**I**n 2024, the **Santa Fe Group** hosted three impactful webinars through the **Colgate Oral Health Network (COHN)**, engaging thousands of professionals worldwide. These programs addressed critical topics in oral health and featured expert speakers who shared valuable insights.



Oral Health  
Network  
for Professional Education  
and Development



The first webinar, **"Accelerating Best Practice in Medical-Dental Integration,"** held on May 30, 2024, was presented by Ms. Anita Glicken, Dr. Tim Ricks, and Dr. Solomon Brotman. It attracted **2,482 live participants**. The event emphasized the integration of medical and dental practices to improve patient outcomes. The speakers explored issues including oral health interventions in primary care education and practice, the incorporation of primary care screenings into dental practices, and access to shared data to support a patient-centered, integrated approach to healthcare.



The second program, **"The Strengths and Weaknesses of Publicly Supported Dental Benefits Programs within the U.S.,"** occurred on November 6, 2024. Presented by Dr. Elisa Chávez, Dr. Nader Nadershahi, and Dr. Nicholas G. Mosca, it attracted **2,196 live attendees**. This session examined the challenges and opportunities in publicly funded dental benefits programs. The webinar offered insights into the differences in funding for oral health care between Medicare and Medicaid, highlighting the gaps in publicly available dental coverage for adults and the significant unmet needs that result from them.



The final webinar of the year, **"Santa Fe Group Medicare Update,"** took place on April 10, 2024. Led by Dr. Lisa Simon, Dr. Linda Niessen, and Mr. Eric Berger, this program attracted **1,699 live participants**. It offered an update on Medicare's role in advancing oral health care, provided the rationale for including dental care in Medicare, defined medically necessary dental care, discussed progress made to date, and identified the next steps.

In total, these three webinars engaged a combined audience of **6,377 live participants**, demonstrating the **Santa Fe Group's** dedication to advancing oral health education and fostering global collaboration in the field. The webinars are archived for offline viewing and continue to garner interest among dental professionals.



# National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

NATIONAL  
ACADEMIES *Sciences  
Engineering  
Medicine*

**T**he **National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine** (NASEM) convened a hybrid workshop, *Advancing Oral Health Across the Lifespan*, at the National Academies Keck Center in Washington, D.C. The Santa Fe Group was one of 15 sponsors of this highly successful meeting that sought multisector solutions to ensuring equitable access to oral health care across the lifespan.

A planning committee, led by **Santa Fe Group** member Ms. Anita Glicken, organized and conducted a public workshop bringing together over 30 experts and key stakeholders, including **Santa Fe Group** members Dr. Elisa Chávez, and Dr. Terri Dolan, to explore innovative practices and models for advancing oral health in the US. The workshop engaged 125 in-person attendees with more than 1100 virtual attendees. Registrants represented all 50 states and D.C. as well as 17 foreign countries. The energy, expertise, and shared commitment of speakers, in-person, and virtual attendees was truly inspiring.

Discussions covered major factors affecting oral health, including health policy, payment models and insurance coverage, community engagement, and workforce issues. The Proceedings of the Workshops are posted in [Brief Highlights](#) featuring the presentations and discussions. The workshop generated significant momentum and alignment on key priorities for advancing oral health. There was strong endorsement from federal and public partners at the workshop to pursue two next steps.

## 1. Creation of a Listserv

To facilitate ongoing communication and collaboration among participants beyond the meeting project, it was suggested an independent listserv be established. The platform was launched in January 2025. It allows registrants, attendees and others to continue to share updates, resources, and opportunities while fostering dialogue and collaboration across networks.

## 2. Formation of the American Coalition for Oral Health (AHOC)

Building on the enthusiasm from the workshop, many expressed support for efforts to establish the American Coalition for Oral Health (ACOH). This independent coalition would serve as a unified voice to advance oral health equity, innovation, and policy. ACOH was envisioned at the workshop to be a dynamic platform for engagement, collaboration and collective action. On World Oral Health Day, March 20, 2025, this vision was realized with the incorporation of ACOH as a 501(c)3 nonprofit.



# World Economic Forum



**T**he World Economic Forum Oral Health Affinity Group (WEF OHAG) continues its work to advocate for investment in oral health, including catalyzing action among key stakeholders at the World Economic Forum Annual Health Roundtable at the sidelines of the World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland. In 2024, the WEF OHAG published **"The Economic Rationale for a Global Commitment to Invest in Oral Health"**, setting out a comprehensive economic case for how money spent on the mouth can contribute to a reduction in costly non-communicable diseases and improve the overall health of individuals and communities, among other benefits. Working to activate new champions for oral health among key healthcare payors, the WEF OHAG met with Chief Health Officers to discuss the financial benefits of offering comprehensive dental coverage to employees, as well as hosted discussions with Ministries of Health on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

# Strategic Advisory Council Update

**O**n December 4, 2024, SFG **Strategic Advisory Council (SAC)** convened its annual meeting in a hybrid format in New York City. The SAC currently has 13 members and welcomed Kim Attanasi representing Haleon, Gary Pickard, representing PDS Health, Greg Poulakos, representing Life and Specialty Ventures and Mark Trimmer, representing Dentsply Sirona.

SFG President, Ralph Fuccillo, provided an update on the SFG recent strategic planning meeting that discussed the future directions and strategies for SFG. Whole person health and health equity will serve as the guide stars for the SFG with workforce development, technology, access to care, integration, and population health as the strategic initiatives.

The SAC reviewed SFG's current focus on the efforts to expand dental benefits in Medicare, to coalition for oral health policy, World Economic Forum Oral Health Affinity Group, and the National Academies workshop.

## **SFG Continues Advocating for Expanding Dental Benefits in Medicare**

**D**ental care must be inextricably linked with covered medical services. In February 2024, SFG members, Drs. Ira Lamster, Judi Haber, Mike C. Alfano and Judy Jones prepared a report that documented the scientific evidence to support a dental benefit for individuals with diabetes, autoimmune diseases and end-stage renal disease. In 2025, CMS has added dental care for patients with end-stage renal disease.

SFG will submit scientific evidence for supporting a dental benefit for individuals with diabetes again in 2025. If accepted, this benefit could help over 16 million adults on Medicare who have diabetes and need oral health care. SFG partnered with the 240 organizations from the medical, dental, public policy and consumer advocacy fields, that are part of the Medicare advocacy group to submit this proposal.

**I**n 2022, SAC members recommended the need for a new organization in dentistry whose goal was to advocate for “what is best oral health policy for society” rather than “what is best oral health policy for my dental practice”. In 2024, the SFG supported the development of the Coalition for Oral Health Policy. Chaired by Dr. Ira Lamster, the coalition has worked to develop a group of strong advocates to advance oral health policy. The group has published several white papers to promote oral health policy.

## **World Economic Forum**

**D**r. Maria Ryan, SAC member, and Mr. David Kochman, SFG member, provided an update on the World Economic Forum and the development of the Oral Health Affinity Group. This group is playing a significant global role highlighting the important role that oral health can play in overall health throughout the world.

## **National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine — “Advancing Oral Health Across the Lifespan: A Workshop”**

**M**s. Anita Glicken, SFG member, reported on the NASEM workshop, “Advancing Oral Health Across the Lifespan”. The workshop’s vision was to “create a future where every American has equitable access to comprehensive oral health care across their lifetime.” The workshop built on the Surgeon General’s Report on Oral Health (2000), NIDCR’s report on Advances and Challenges of Oral Health in American (2021) and other NASEM efforts to improve oral health. Several SAC members and SFG members attended this meeting and commented on its activities and efforts to continue the focus on this workshop.



# MEMBERSHIP



# Strategic Advisory Council





# Executive Management Committee

In 2024, the **Executive Management Committee** (EMC) expanded its membership to include the Chair of the Governance Committee, Dr. Judy Jones and the Chair of the Strategic Advisory Council, Dr. Linda Niessen. This reflects our commitment to fostering broader collaboration and perspectives in our decision-making processes.

The EMC now includes the President, Vice President, Immediate-Past President, Secretary, Treasurer, and the two newly added Chairs, working together to guide the organization's strategic direction and overall success.

**Ralph Fuccillo, M.A.**  
President

**Dushanka V. Kleinman, D.D.S., M.Sc.D.**  
Vice President

**Teresa A. Dolan, D.D.S., M.P.H.**  
Immediate-Past President

**Judith Haber, Ph.D., A.P.R.N., F.A.A.N.**  
Secretary, Chair of Communications Committee

**Fotinos S. Panagakos, D.M.D., Ph.D.**  
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**Judith Jones, D.D.S., M.P.H., D.Sc.D.**  
Chair of the Governance Committee

**Linda Niessen, D.M.D., M.P.H., M.P.P.**  
Chair of the Strategic Advisory Council

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**Arthur Dugoni,**  
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**Lawrence Meskin,**  
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**Harold Slavkin,**  
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**Gina Thornton-Evans,**  
D.D.S., M.P.H.

# 2024 SFG Partnerships

In 2024, the **Santa Fe Group** strengthened its commitment to advancing oral health through key sponsorships and partnerships with organizations that share our focus on health equity and policy advocacy. Our contributions supported impactful initiatives, while the collaboration and expertise from our partners helped drive progress in expanding access and improving care for all. Together, we continue to amplify our collective efforts toward systemic change in oral health.



# Member Spotlight: Celebrating Excellence in 2024

**W**e recognize all of our members, senior scholars, and fellows for their continued dedication and outstanding contributions throughout 2024. While each individual's efforts help shape the future of dental research, education, and public health, we are pleased to shine a spotlight on a few of our colleagues whose achievements in 2024 have had a notable impact. Their leadership and hard work continue to inspire us all, and we are proud to celebrate their success.



## Raul Garcia

(Elected as Vice-President of the International Association for Dental Research)

Dr. Raul Garcia's election as Vice President of the **International Association for Dental Research** (IADR) marks a significant

milestone in his distinguished career. In this prestigious role, Dr. Garcia will continue to advocate for advancements in dental research and promote global initiatives aimed at improving oral health.



## Nader Nadershahi

(2024 William John Gies Award Winner from the American College of Dentists )

Dr. Nader Nadershahi, Dean of the Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry at the University of the Pacific, was honored with the prestigious 2024 William John Gies Award from the American College of Dentists.

This award recognizes Dr. Nadershahi's exceptional leadership in dental education, commitment to advancing the profession, and contributions to the well-being of his students and the community.





## Gina Thornton-Evans

(CDC, Director of the Division of Oral Health)

Dr. Gina Thornton-Evans served as the Director of the Division of Oral Health at the **Centers for Disease Control** and Prevention

(CDC). In this role, she oversaw programs aimed at improving oral health and reducing health disparities across the country. Her leadership contributed to the CDC's ongoing efforts in oral health promotion and public health initiatives.

## Anita Glicken, Elisa Chávez, Gina Thornton-Evans, and Terri Dolan

(NASEM: Advancing Oral Health Across the Lifespan: A Workshop)

**The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's** Advancing Oral Health Across the Lifespan workshop greatly benefited from the expertise and contributions of Ms. Anita Glicken, Dr. Elisa Chávez, Dr. Gina Thornton-Evans, and Dr. Terri Dolan. Their collaborative efforts in shaping policies and initiatives aimed at improving oral health across all stages of life will have a lasting impact on the field. Their work continues to influence the future of oral health at both the national and global levels.




## Honoring Dr. Rekow

(Dianne Rekow Mentoring Science Award)

We honor the legacy of Dr. Dianne Rekow with the Dianne Rekow Mentoring Science Award, which was created by the

**International Association for Dental Research (IADR)**. This award recognizes outstanding mentors who have made significant contributions to advancing dental research careers. Dr. Rekow's dedication to mentorship continues to inspire the next generation of scientists and researchers.



Continuing our commitment to  
advancing **oral health access** in  
**2024 and beyond.**



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