

Delta Dental of Arkansas Promotes Sharon Lanier to Foundation Executive Director



The Foundation Leads Statewide Efforts to Improve the Oral Health of Arkansans

Delta Dental of Arkansas has promoted Sharon Lanier, Ph.D., to Executive Director of the Delta Dental of Arkansas Foundation, effective immediately. She previously served as the interim director.

As head of the Foundation, Sharon will spearhead statewide partnerships to develop long-term programs and initiatives to prevent severe oral health issues and avoid costly interventions later on. The Foundation donates an average of \$1 million each year to Arkansas non-profits, government organizations and schools to support oral health education and dental disease and prevention projects. Arkansas ranks among the bottom five states in dental health.

“With her strategic vision, keen analytical skills and passion for philanthropy, Sharon has already opened new doors and strengthened the impact of both Delta Dental of Arkansas and the Foundation,” said Kristin Merlo, President & CEO of Delta Dental of Arkansas. “Her future contributions will further accelerate our mission to improve the oral health of all Arkansans.”

Through its business and philanthropic operations, Delta Dental of Arkansas is deeply committed to advancing the oral health and well-being of Arkansans. It facilitates access to dental care by offering affordable insurance rates, maintaining the state’s largest network of participating providers and fully funding its own Foundation to serve low-income, uninsured residents. It directs a significant proportion of net income from operations annually to the Foundation, a total of more than \$25 million since its inception in 2008.

The Foundation has served as the primary funder of a multi-year community water fluoridation effort, which was mandated by Act 197 by the Arkansas Legislature in 2011 as a cavity-prevention measure. As a result, more than 90% of Arkansans have access to optimally fluoridated tap water compared to the national average of 75%.

It has since expanded its focus to collaborate with local and statewide organizations to develop strategic, systemic solutions that increase access to dental care, advance oral health equity and strengthen communities across Arkansas.

“I am grateful for the opportunity to lead the Foundation’s efforts in creating transformational change in oral health for Arkansans.,” Sharon said. “Delta Dental is uniquely positioned to address the oral health disparity in our state, and I am committed to integrating learning and sharing through community partnerships into the Foundation’s organizational strategy.”

A 10-year veteran of the non-profit sector, Sharon joined the Foundation in early 2021 as a community impact analyst. Previously, she held a leadership position in community partnership development with the American Heart Association. Sharon earned a bachelor’s degree in broadcast journalism from UA LR, a master’s degree in psychology from the University of Phoenix and a doctorate in interdisciplinary leadership studies from UCA. She is also a graduate of Leadership Greater Little Rock, Class XXXII; a board member of Just Communities of Arkansas, and a Racial & Cultural Diversity Commissioner for the City of Little Rock. She lives in Little Rock with her husband and sons.

Source: [Delta Dental of Arkansas](#)

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