



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Connecticut Oral Health Initiative receives \$25,000 Delta Dental grant to launch *Salute to Smiles* program for Greater Hartford Veterans

HARTFORD, CT – The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI), a nonprofit organization focused on strengthening and safeguarding access to quality, affordable, equitable oral health services for all Connecticut residents, recently received a \$25,000 SMILE Grant from Delta Dental Foundation. The funds will support the launch of COHI's new *Salute to Smiles* program, offering critical dental services at no cost to veterans in the Greater Hartford area who struggle to access oral health care.

Connecticut is home to over 150,000 veterans, with more than 36,000 residing in Greater Hartford. *Salute to Smiles* aims to address gaps in care by providing access to preventive and restorative dental care, as well as oral health education and resource navigation for veterans in need.

"So many veterans in our state face barriers to affordable dental care once they leave active duty," said Gary Turco, COHI Executive Director. "With *Salute to Smiles*, we're working to close those gaps by ensuring veterans have access to the services and resources they need and deserve to maintain their oral health and overall wellness. We are incredibly grateful to Delta Dental Foundation for supporting this initiative and making the launch of this program possible."

The program will provide immediate care for urgent oral health needs and emphasize prevention through partnerships with dental hygienists and providing education on proper oral hygiene. Veterans will receive support in establishing Dental Homes, navigating eligibility for Medicaid or private insurance, and connecting with trusted providers for long-term care.

"We are honored to support this important initiative that provides essential dental care to Connecticut's veterans. Their service and sacrifice deserve not only our gratitude but also access to the healthcare they need," said Paul Di Maio, President & CEO, Delta Dental of Connecticut, Inc. and Vice President, Delta Dental Foundation. "Through this grant, we hope to help improve the health and quality of life for those who have given so much for our country."

The program will also establish contracts with CT State Community College Tunxis and UConn School of Dental Medicine to provide dental services to veterans.

"CT State Community College, Tunxis is excited to partner with COHI as they launch their *Salute to Smiles* program," said Dr. Patricia Johnson Lane, Dental Hygiene Program Coordinator and Professor of Dental Hygiene. "Through this partnership, CT State Tunxis dental hygiene students will be providing oral health education and dental hygiene services to veterans in our state. This is a vital first step in reducing barriers by providing veterans access to much needed treatment. This new partnership supports CT State's commitment to supporting veterans. For the past decade, the Tunxis dental hygiene program has been providing care to Tunxis student veterans through the Recruit a Smile program. This new collaboration with COHI will help expand outreach to the

broader veteran community. This partnership not only enhances access to care for Connecticut veterans, but also creates meaningful, real-world learning opportunities for dental hygiene students—making this initiative a mutually beneficial step forward for both veterans and the future of oral health care providers."

"The UConn School of Dental Medicine is pleased to be able to partner with COHI in helping to meet the oral healthcare needs of veterans. This project is consistent with the School's commitment to providing veterans with critically important dental care and complements our veterans' programs, which also benefit from support from the Delta Dental Foundation," said Dr. Steven Lepowsky, Dean of the UConn School of Dental Medicine.

A dedicated website and educational materials are currently underway for the program, as well as an easy sign-up process to check eligibility for Veterans seeking services. More information can be found at www.ctoralhealth.org/salute.

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About The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative

The Connecticut Oral Health Initiative, Inc. (COHI) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that advocates for equal access to quality oral health care in Connecticut. COHI's vision is for all Connecticut residents to have equal opportunity to obtain the services needed to maintain good oral health. More information can be found at www.ctoralhealth.org.

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