

Alliance for Oral Health Across Borders Develops Hands-On Workshop to Highlight Key Role of Civil Society in Global Oral Health

The Alliance for Oral Health Across Borders (AOHAB) convened a hands-on workshop, “Public Voice in Global Oral Health” at the 12th World Congress on Preventive Dentistry (WCPD) held in conjunction with International Association for Dental Research (IADR) annual session in Bogotá, Colombia on June 24, 2023.

The World Congress of Preventive Dentistry event is intended to foster collaboration within the global oral health community, and is held every four years in a different part of the world to provide a platform to communicate the latest research findings that can impact preventive disease and oral health promoting innovations at the community, institutional and/or clinical levels to enhance population health.

Following two very successful Think Tank and Open Forum webinars, Public Voices in Global Oral Health: A Call to Action! and Public Voices in Global Oral Health: A Missing Link to Accelerate Progress, designed to cultivate a cutting-edge community interested in sharing ideas and innovation, the Alliance for Oral Health Across Borders collaborated with the Global Oral Health Inequalities Research Network of the IADR to convene a hands-on workshop at the meeting entitled “Beyond Advocacy to Action for Oral Health: The Key Role of Civil Society”. The workshop addressed the following objectives:

1. To understand how oral health can be regarded as a public good and through this mobilize support for oral health promotion alongside other noncommunicable/chronic diseases;
2. To strategize how participation of diverse community members, including patients, people living with oral diseases, the poor, those who are vulnerable, or disadvantaged can be more effectively engaged;
3. To provide a platform to exchange ideas about actionable, feasible, cost effective and sustainable protocols for future implementation and related research that will generate valid and reliable evidence to enhance oral health & overall health.

The program was moderated by Professor Peter Mossey, Professor of Craniofacial Development, Dean for Internationalization at the University of Dundee, Scotland, and Alliance for Oral Health Across Borders member.

Three introductory presentations by global leading experts in their field started off the Workshop:

“The WHO Global Oral Health Action Plan 2023-2030 and what Might Help with Implementation” Dr. Benoit Varenne, Chief Oral Health, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland.

“Description of a Program Reaching out to Those Living with Oral Disease and How to Influence this Group to move Towards Better Health”. Dr. Andrea Rodriguez, School of Dental Medicine, University of Dundee, Scotland.

“The Role of Social Will in Reinforcing Research Evidence to Change Policy.” Dr. Lois K. Cohen, Consultant and Paul G. Rogers Ambassador for Global Health Research, Bethesda, MD USA and Alliance for Oral Health Across Borders member.

Attendees from many countries engaged in small group discussions to develop concrete ideas for next steps in moving better oral health and general health a reality.

“Health policy is usually comprised of three major elements: research evidence; political will and social will. When these elements are synchronized and merged, the likelihood of constructive social action that can guide communities towards better health is enhanced. The critical element that, in my view, has been missing in our oral health space is that of ‘social will’ or the voices of the public who need and want better oral health. We need greater research attention to be focused on the public and how to activate and enable their voices to be heard in the places where policy can be enacted and implemented.” (Dr. Lois K. Cohen)

Following the IADR/WCPD meetings in Bogota, the Alliance for Oral Health Across Borders is moving forward with the following action items to improve oral health globally:

1. Development of a Think Tank and Open Forum webinar on “The Controversial Six-Month Recall” to be aired in October.
2. Contribution of comments for the NCD Alliance as that organization of which AOHAB is a member prepares commentary for a discussion at the forthcoming United Nations General Assembly discussion in September on Universal Health Care.
3. Follow up with IADR workshop attendees for future international collaboration with regard to amplifying constructive public voices for better oral health.

“Currently there is no official platform for civil society to speak out on behalf of oral health in many countries or at a global level. The Alliance for Oral Health Across Borders is laying the groundwork to take on this role. I am honored, to have been able to work with such prominent supporters in addressing this significant issue.” ...Dr. Deborah Weisfuse, President, Alliance for Oral Health Across Borders