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American Dental Hygienists' Association Apologizes for Role in Systemic Racism
Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to Drive Strategic Initiatives

CHICAGO, March 2, 2022 – As part of its strategic planning ahead of its 100th anniversary as an association representing the nation's dental hygiene profession, the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) is apologizing to communities of color for its role in perpetuating a culture of discrimination.

ADHA President Sharlee Burch, RDH, MPH, EdD said, "We cannot celebrate the accomplishments of a century of our progress in oral health without also reflecting on, and reckoning with, the wrongdoing and harm that was caused by discrimination against dental hygienists of color on our watch."

In a letter issued to the National Dental Hygienists' Association (NDHA), ADHA acknowledges that the founding of NDHA by African American dental hygienists was necessary in part due to opportunities that were denied to them by ADHA. "We sincerely and deeply apologize to dental hygienists of color for our failure to confront discriminatory membership practices that expressly excluded them. We are ashamed that we were no different from many national associations of the past century that permitted the exclusion of practitioners and professionals of color. Despite ADHA's reaffirmation of its policy on open membership in 1965, we recognize our failure to advocate for African American hygienists and the effects our complicity had on this community, some of which are felt to this day," the apology states.

The 2020-2023 ADHA Strategic Plan includes Diversity & Inclusion as one of four core values. "Our strategic plan is a blueprint that is guiding us on our mission-driven journey to unite and empower the dental hygiene community, and to enhance the public's oral and overall health," said ADHA CEO Ann Battrell, MSDH. "As leaders in oral health we must be willing to be accountable, and to actively work to eliminate inequities that exist for both dental hygienists and the patients we serve."

Initiatives that prioritize Diversity & Inclusion are being integrated across the domains of the organization that include Community, Continuing Education, Governance and Advocacy. This includes ongoing staff and Board of Trustees training to ensure future

operational and leader readiness to advance anti-racism efforts as well as the expansion of educational programming to include cultural humility, implicit bias and other equity-centered courses. ADHA's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) Committee has also been formed to identify areas for engaging the dental hygiene community as well as assessing organizational policies.

"There's no question that striving for equity requires a collective effort," added Dr. Burch. "It also requires a willingness to examine and dismantle systems and practices we have accepted for too long. The work is overdue, and the time is now to accelerate anti-racism and foster a sense of belonging for all dental hygienists."

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About the American Dental Hygienists' Association

The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) is the largest national organization representing the professional interests of the country's more than 226,000 dental hygienists. Dental hygienists are preventive oral health professionals, licensed in dental hygiene, who provide educational, clinical, and therapeutic services that support total health through the promotion of optimal oral health. To learn more about ADHA, dental hygiene or the link between oral health and general health, visit ADHA at www.adha.org.