

February 24, 2022

Dr. Robert Otto Valdez, Ph.D., M.H.S.A.
Director, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Dear Dr. Valdez,

On behalf of the American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research (AADOOCR), I am writing today to extend our congratulations to you on your appointment to the position of Director of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). We are confident that the agency will benefit from your expertise and history of leadership in health services research, the U.S. healthcare system, and health policy analysis.

AADOOCR is a non-profit association representing more than 3,100 individual and more than 100 institutional members working throughout the country on dental, oral, and craniofacial research issues. Our mission is to drive research in this area to advance health and well-being, and part of that charge is moving research into policy and practice.

One of our top legislative priorities each year is ensuring robust federal funding for AHRQ because we believe the agency has a proven track record of creating pipelines of new medical findings that reach health care providers and patients. Further, it is the only federal agency that funds research at universities and other research institutions on health systems – seeking to better understand the root causes of disease, complex comorbidities in patients, and the interactions and intersections of health care providers.

As highlighted in the recent NIH report [*Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges*](#)¹, to significantly improve the nation's oral health, policy changes are needed to reduce or eliminate social, economic, and other systemic inequities that affect oral health behaviors and access to care. We believe AHRQ's mission – producing evidence to make health care safer, higher quality, more accessible, equitable, and affordable – is critical to improving the nation's oral health.

¹ National Institutes of Health. Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges. Bethesda, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for this integrated approach as we have witnessed the underlying structures that perpetuate inequities in health. Oral health – too often considered in isolation – is a critical part of this equation. Americans disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 are also more likely to suffer from poor oral health, which conversely puts people at greater risk for COVID-19 complications. The oral cavity also serves as a window into other health issues, including systemic diseases, such as diabetes, HIV/AIDS and Sjögren's.

We are pleased that the Administration has selected you, an experienced leader in research, health disparities and health policy, for this important role. Our members look forward to working together with you and your team to advance AHRQ's mission and support research that improves health care quality, reduces socioeconomic health disparities, and broadens access to essential services like oral health and dental care.

Again, we congratulate you on your confirmation and we hope to meet with you to discuss how AADOCR and AHRQ can work together in the coming years. Should you have any questions or if we can be of any assistance, please contact Yehuda Sugarman, Director of Government Affairs, at ysugarman@iadr.org or at 703.299.8098. We stand by to assist you in any way we can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chris H. Fox".

Christopher H. Fox, DMD, DMSc
Chief Executive Officer