



HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY GROUP

What's Your Moonshot?

Where World-Class Healthcare Leaders Seek To Solve Big Problems

Advancing Access and Affordability in Veterans' Oral Health

Insights from a conversation with **Wade Rakes, Chief Executive Officer of CareQuest Institute for Oral Health** on the urgent need to improve oral healthcare access for U.S. veterans.

The discussion explored the intersection of oral health, chronic disease prevention, and affordability and access disparities for veterans.

The Veterans Access Crisis



- ▶ Despite nearly 18 million veterans in the U.S., only a small percentage currently receive comprehensive dental coverage through the VA system. A lack of access leads to delayed treatment, higher healthcare costs and preventable disruptions to work, school and everyday life.
- ▶ Key challenges:
 - Veterans paying 65% more out of pocket for oral healthcare than the general population.
 - Rural veterans often live more than 50 miles from the nearest dentist.
 - Limited access to specialists outside urban areas.
 - Workforce shortages across oral health professions.
 - Reliance on emergency rooms for preventable oral health issues.

Innovation and Policy Opportunities Expanding Care Delivery Models



- ▶ The importance of policy reform and investment in clinician education and workforce development also plays a key role in improving access to care.
- ▶ Emerging solutions that can help address provider shortages and rural access challenges, include:
 - Dental therapy programs.
 - Tele-dentistry and technology-enabled care.
 - Greater use of nurse practitioners, hygienists, and physician assistants.
 - Integrated care delivery models within community health centers.
 - Medical-dental integration within primary care settings.

The Moonshot From "Some" to "All"



- ▶ Ensuring every veteran — not just some — has access to comprehensive, integrated oral healthcare. Recognizing that supporting veterans' whole health is not only a healthcare imperative, but a moral responsibility to those who have served.
- ▶ The vision includes:
 - Universal access to comprehensive oral healthcare for veterans.
 - Better integration between dental and primary care.
 - Expanded preventative care and early intervention.
 - Reduced emergency department utilization.
 - Greater affordability and accessibility nationwide.

Why This Matters Now



- ▶ The conversation comes at a critical time as expanded veteran eligibility through legislation like the PACT Act increases demand for oral healthcare services across the country.
- ▶ Expanding coverage alone is not enough — the healthcare system must also ensure veterans can realistically access high-quality, affordable care in their communities.



Closing Perspective

- ▶ A call to action for policymakers, healthcare organizations and industry leaders to rethink how oral healthcare is delivered and integrated across the healthcare ecosystem.
- ▶ Improving veterans' oral health is achievable, measurable and essential to improving whole-person care for those who serve our country.



Today, veterans face significant barriers to quality oral healthcare — paying more out of pocket and often living farther from providers — while oral health remains disconnected from primary and preventative care despite its critical role in reducing chronic conditions and improving overall health outcomes.

*~ Wade Rakes,
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Co-Hosts



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Featured Guest



Wade Rakes

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If you are interested in being a guest on the series, please contact [Melissa Gomez](#).