



FRAMING STRATEGY

Strategic Framing Recommendations Guide

This section highlights the main messages to make when communicating about oral health. Use this list as a guide when developing anything from executive summaries to blog posts, to quotes for a press release.

1. Connect oral health to overall health.

Experts know that oral health affects physical, mental, and behavioral health, but most Americans don't make this connection. Even when prompted, people have a limited understanding of how the health of the mouth affects the health of the body (and vice versa). Most Americans think that good oral health simply means teeth without cavities; they don't understand that poor oral health increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, complications during pregnancy and childbirth, and other conditions, nor do they realize that it affects mental health and social outcomes, such as employment opportunities.

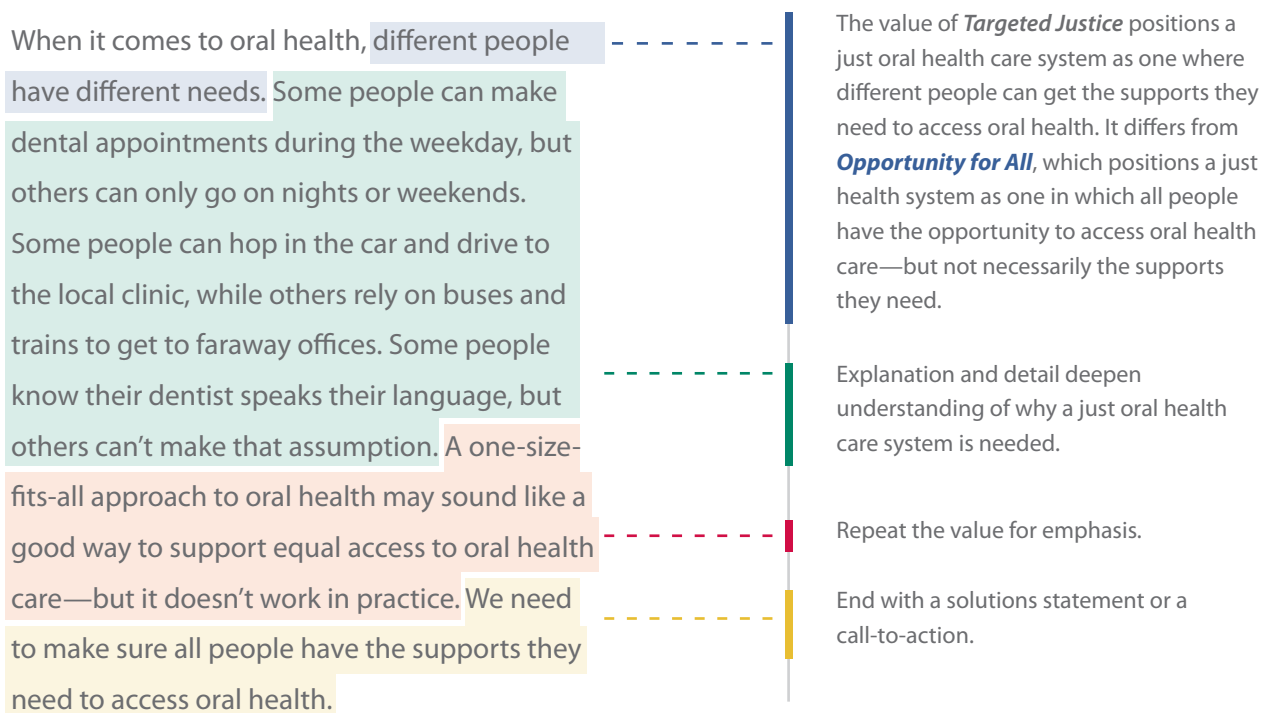
For this reason, FrameWorks recommends making an explicit connection between oral and overall health in communications materials and repeating it often to deepen the public's understanding of this issue. Messages like these can't be repeated enough. Feel free to use these messages verbatim or come up with variations on the these themes:

- Healthier mouths mean healthier people. And healthier people mean stronger communities.
- When our mouths are healthy, our bodies and minds are more likely to be healthy, too.
- Oral health affects overall health. When we take care of our mouths, we're taking care of our bodies and minds, too.
- Oral health and overall health are closely linked. When the body is healthy, the mouth is more likely to be healthy, too. And vice versa.
- There's a two-way connection between the mouth and the body. Healthy mouths mean healthier bodies, and healthier bodies mean healthier mouths.

2. Use the value of *Targeted Justice* to cue a collective and systemic perspective.

Values are enduring and cherished cultural ideals that guide people’s attitudes and behaviors. They have proven framing effects, affecting public thinking and determining the extent to which people support policy and programmatic solutions. FrameWorks found that *Targeted Justice* was the best one to use in shifting public thinking about oral health from an individualistic to a systemic perspective, and to boost support for the idea that society has a collective responsibility to address oral health inequities.

Here’s what this frame element might look like in response to a question from a reporter about how to address oral health disparities:

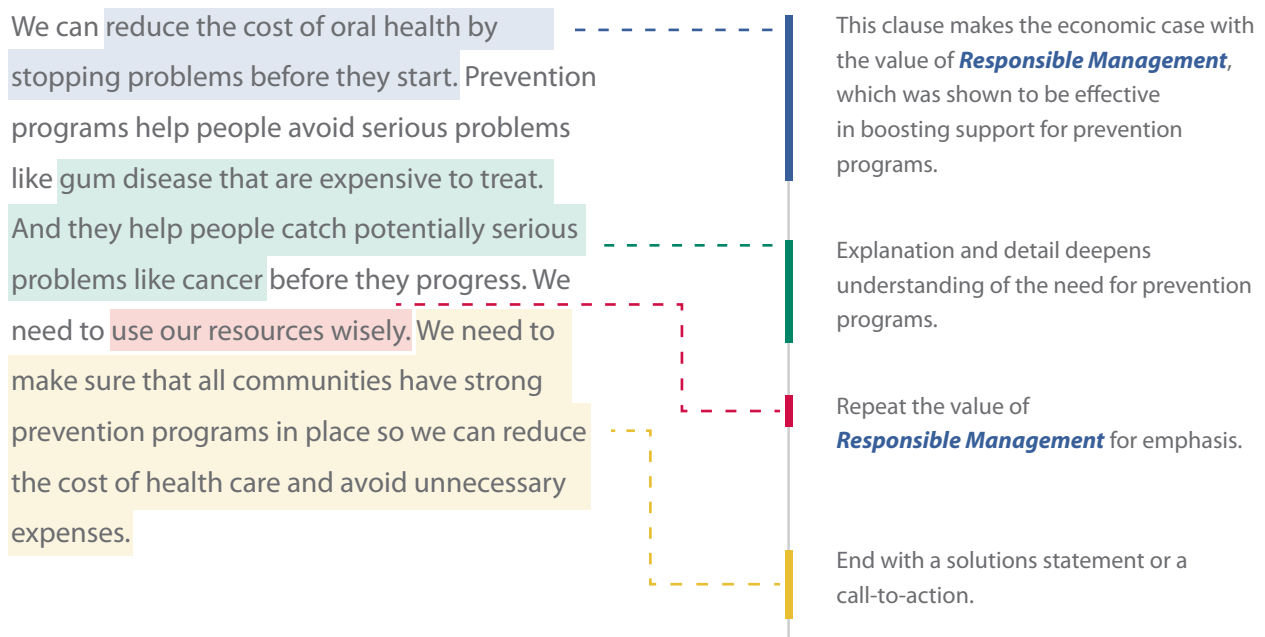


Framing tip: *Because appeals to values establish why an issue is a matter of public concern, they work especially well at the start of a message, where they can prime people to listen more productively to the information that follows.*

3. Use the value of *Responsible Management* to broaden the concept of prevention.

When arguing for widespread prevention strategies, oral health advocates often highlight the economic consequences of our nation’s inadequate approach to prevention and care. FrameWorks’ research found that the most powerful way to make this case is to use the value of *Responsible Management*. This value focuses on increased costs associated with the lack of access to affordable care; it highlights how current approaches create incentives for people to defer treatment, which leads to more serious problems that are ultimately more expensive to treat.

Responsible Management was shown to boost the public’s sense of collective responsibility to address poor oral health outcomes and led to increases in people’s understanding of how systemic factors affect oral health. Here’s what this element might look like in a short speech at the beginning of press conference about an initiative to support oral health prevention programs:



Framing tip: Sometimes, subtle framing shifts are helpful with specific audiences. FrameWorks’ research found this to be the case with partisan groups. To make an economic argument with Republicans, emphasize that if society **fails** to act on oral health, economic **losses** and public health **problems** will follow. With Democratic audiences, make the inverse argument: If society takes action to **improve** oral health, economic **gains** and public health **improvements** will follow.

4. Use the *Keys to Oral Health* metaphor to explain systemic barriers.

Americans have a strong tendency to think of issues related to health in highly individualistic terms: individuals need to brush their teeth, go to the dentist, and take good care of themselves to ensure they have good oral health. To build understanding of oral health as a public health issue, FrameWorks designed the *Keys to Oral Health* metaphor to bring systemic thinking about barriers to the forefront of people's thinking in a way that also led people to see that public solutions were reasonable and feasible. Note how the systemic solutions are the keys that unlock access to good oral health and reduce inequity.

Here's what it might look like in the body of an op-ed about access to oral health care:

Accessing good oral health is like going through a series of locked doors. These doors open up to fluoridated water and nutritious food, insurance that covers dental benefits, and dentists who accept different kinds of health insurance. Some people have all the keys they need to unlock the doors to oral health, but others are missing some keys. Without a full set of keys, people won't be able to get to good oral health—no matter how hard they try. To build a healthier nation, we need to make sure all people have the keys they need to access good oral health.

This paragraph opens with a direct comparison of access to oral health to going through locked doors.

This sentence gives examples what is behind the locked doors—the structural supports people need to access good oral health.

These statements show that the barriers to good oral health are systemic, taking blame off of individuals.

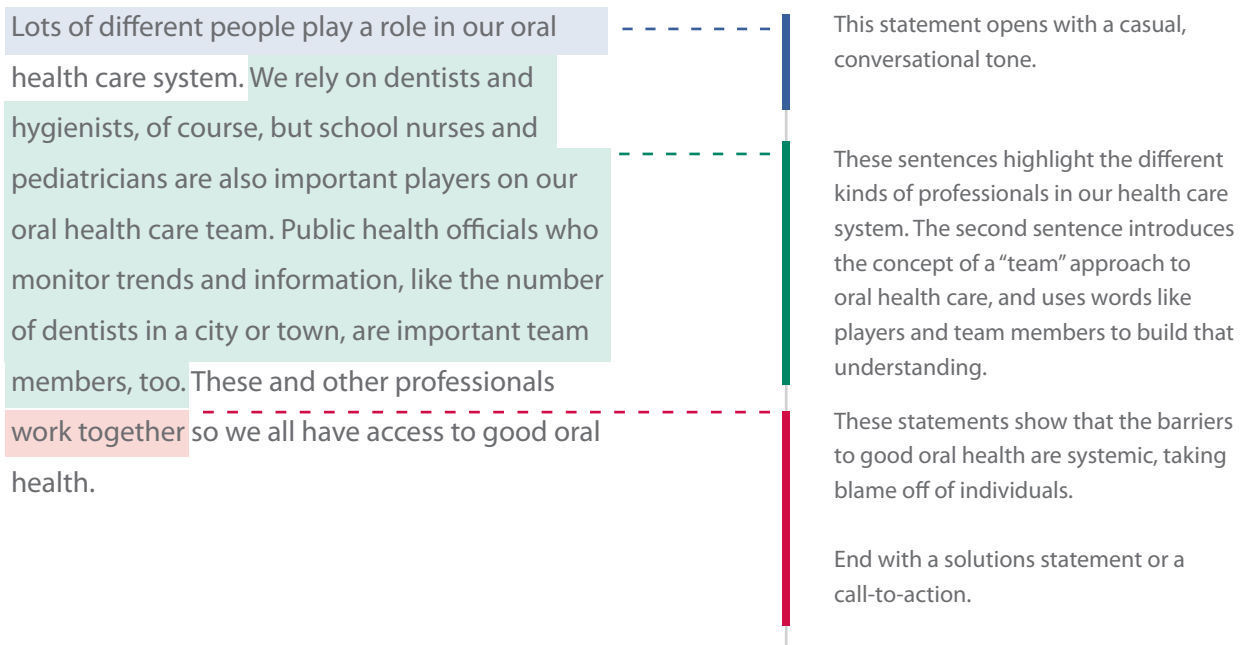
End with a solutions statement or a call-to-action.

Framing tip: *Feel free to be creative when using this metaphor. And don't forget to use images to illustrate the concepts. Opportunities for visuals with doors, locks, and keys abound.*

5. Emphasize that oral health involves a broad team of professionals.

When asked about the important actors in oral health care, most people will say dentists, hygienists, and maybe receptionists, leaving out the many other types of people who affect oral health care in our country, such as school nurses and primary care providers. Researchers found that talking about the various oral health providers as part of a “team” helped broaden understanding of how oral health care could be provided outside the dentist’s office.

For this reason, FrameWorks urges advocates to look for communication opportunities to help Americans visualize the different places where oral health care services are provided and the many different people involved in our oral health care system. Here’s one example of what this might look like in an FAQ about our oral health care system:



Framing tip: Find ways to use the team metaphor across communications platforms to help people see oral health as a public health issue. This one also lends itself to images: Use art to illustrate the different professionals on the oral health care team and show the different places that they work.



FRAMING STRATEGY

Recommendations Summary Sheet

RECOMMENDATION #1:

Connect oral health to overall health.

Instead of:

Using frames that narrow the scope of the issue to the teeth.

Try:

Using images, examples, and explanations that show the connection between oral health and overall health.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

Use the value of *Targeted Justice* to cue a collective and systemic perspective.

Instead of:

Using unframed data about disparities.

Try:

Telling a fuller story about promoting equitable access to quality care.

RECOMMENDATION #3:

Use the value of *Responsible Management* to broaden the concept of prevention.

Instead of:

Leaving prevention undefined, undescribed, or individualized.

Try:

Showing how poor oral health imposes unnecessary and avoidable costs to our health care system.

RECOMMENDATION #4:

Use the *Keys to Oral Health* metaphor to explain systemic barriers.

Instead of:

Zooming in on individual cases to illustrate systemic problems.

Try:

Comparing systemic barriers to “locked doors” and solutions as “keys” that unlock greater access.

RECOMMENDATION #5:

Emphasize that oral health involves a broad team of professionals.

Instead of:

Leaving solutions to the public’s imagination.

Try:

Advancing the idea that oral health involves a team of professionals who work across the community.