



## FRAMING STRATEGY FAQs

**Q: *Isn't oral health mostly about brushing and flossing? What we need to do is get people to take more responsibility for taking better care of their teeth!***

### THE FALSE-START ANSWER

Oral health is about more than brushing and flossing. It is a serious health concern with far-reaching consequences. Far too many people suffer and die needlessly from untreated oral health issues. According to the US Surgeon General's 2000 report *Oral Health in America*, if left untreated, poor oral health is the "silent X-factor promoting the onset of life-threatening diseases, which are responsible for the deaths of millions of Americans each year." Just look at the tragic death of 12-year-old Deamonte Driver in 2007 from complications resulting from a brain infection brought about by an abscess.

### THE REFRAMED ANSWER

Oral health is about the whole mouth—the teeth, the tongue, the gums, the entire oral cavity. And it goes far beyond that. Oral health is inextricably linked to overall health. It affects physical and mental health, and social outcomes too. People with untreated dental problems, for example, often have difficulty finding jobs, which lowers employment. A healthy mouth is one sign of a healthy body. When we make sure all people—in their unique situations—can unlock the doors to good oral health, we create stronger, healthier communities for us all.

### THE FALSE-START ANSWER ANALYSIS

- Leading with familiar prevention behaviors (brushing and flossing) reinforces little-picture thinking about oral health, which limits support for policy solutions and public health approaches.
- If statistics about the scope of the problem are not coupled with solutions, people think that the problem is too big to fix.
- Stories of individuals that don't illuminate the systemic nature of oral health concerns do not give people a sense for how they might take action as citizens.

### THE REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS

- This statement makes the explicit connection between oral health and overall health, which will deepen the public's understanding of the relationship between the two.
- This is an example of how oral health relates to overall health, and even financial health. In contrast with the example in the false-start answer, this answer adopts a solutions-oriented tone, which is designed to mitigate fatalistic thinking about oral health in America.
- This speaker concludes with the value of **Targeted Justice**, making the case that a just society is one in which people have what they need to access oral health care. It nods to the metaphor of access as a system of keys and corresponding doors.

**Q: How can we address disparities in oral health outcomes for more Americans?**

**THE FALSE-START ANSWER**

To put this problem in context, fewer than one out of every three Hispanic or Latino people has visited the dentist in the past year, compared with about half of all white non-Hispanics. We must do better at connecting communities with resources to drive access to care by developing plans and enacting policies to provide support at the population level. It is our duty to advocate for policies that improve outcomes for the most vulnerable in our communities. Comprehensive health care reform should also include provisions that allow for the testing and demonstration of mid-level oral health care providers working in conjunction with other members of the health care team.

**THE REFRAMED ANSWER**

Achieving good oral health is like going through a series of locked doors. Some doors open up access to nutritious foods, some to dentists who carry your insurance, and some to providers who speak your language. We need to make sure all people have the keys they need to unlock the doors to good oral health. Behind one of these doors is access to information about prevention. Dental hygienists are in a good position to provide preventive care and educate patients about steps they can take to prevent oral health problems. But many states bar them from practicing to the full extent of their training and expertise. That reduces patients' access to providers, which means many patients don't have access to providers who can meet their needs. We can unlock the door to preventive care by reforming our health care regulations so they allow all people on the health care team perform at their highest level.

**THE FALSE-START ANSWER ANALYSIS**

- The public has strong and deeply held individualistic ways of understanding oral health. Without careful framing, statistics can be easily misinterpreted as showing that certain cultural, racial, or ethnic groups (in this case Latinos) don't care enough about taking care of themselves. Advocates should explain why some groups might lack access to the care they need and emphasize that oral health matters to all of us, and we all benefit when our communities are stronger and healthier.
- Jargon is another lost opportunity to build understanding. Most Americans don't understand technical language like "driving access to care." Instead, advocates should explain how solutions work in plain language. For example, they should describe what "testing and demonstration of mid-level oral health care providers" means in language that people without expertise in the provision of oral health care (i.e., most people) can understand.

**THE REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS**

- This answer begins with the *Keys to Oral Health* metaphor, which has been proven to shift thinking from an individualistic to a societal perspective. It helps the public understand the systemic barriers to good oral health and that the solution is not about willpower or caring.
- It then transitions to an explanatory chain about the role that dental hygienists play in preventing oral health problems and positions hygienists as important members of health care "teams," a term that helps the public understand the wide array of professionals who are involved in our nation's oral health care system.
- The answer ends with a solution: reforming health care policies and practices to allow hygienists to practice to the full extent of their expertise and training.

**Q: If the federal government mandates all states to provide adult Medicaid recipients with dental care, then premiums are going to go up. Why should taxpayers have to pay for other people's care? It's not my fault they don't brush their teeth.**

### THE FALSE-START ANSWER

Taxpayers in many states already do require Medicaid to provide adults with comprehensive dental insurance. Other states don't provide comprehensive dental coverage for adults, and some don't provide any coverage at all! This is outrageous! It is our responsibility as citizens to ensure that everyone can go to the dentist. That's what a just system looks like. It's one that ensures opportunity for all—and it is our job to support a just system as taxpayers. Oral health is a right—not a privilege.

### THE REFRAMED ANSWER

When people have dental insurance, they're more likely to have healthier mouths. And when they have healthier mouths, they are also more likely to have healthier minds and healthier bodies. Ensuring that all adults have access to dental insurance will help us build a stronger, healthier population. Health insurance reform will lower the cost to society because it will prevent oral health problems and avoid expensive treatment. We need to use our resources wisely and make sure that all people have access to care.

### THE FALSE-START ANSWER ANALYSIS

- Instead of leading with a value, this answer takes a defensive posture and then expresses moral outrage at differences between states. Because the public doesn't necessarily have access to the depth of knowledge about how the problem works, it can't be assumed that they share this feeling of moral outrage, and they may tune out the speaker.
- This answer makes the case that a just system is one that provides opportunity for all. FrameWorks' research shows that this appeal is less effective than Targeted Justice, which argues that a just system is one in which all people have the supports they need to access good oral health and that a one-size-fits-all approach to oral health care won't work.
- The answer ends with an explicit statement about human rights. FrameWorks' research has proven explicit rights-based language is less effective than explaining how the issue works and using the value of Targeted Justice to explain what a just system looks like.

### THE REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS

- This answer begins by making the connection between oral health and overall health to deepen the public's understanding of why this issue is important and how it works.
- It cues up a sense of efficacy—the belief that problems can be solved.
- And it concludes by teasing out the societal aspects of oral health care, showing how a societal solution (reforming government health insurance) can solve the problem.