



## **Council on Orthodontic Practice Report**

**February 2026**

This year, COOP has met three times, twice virtually (July 25 and January 26) and once in-person (November 25). The work of COOP has primarily been focused on 4 topics since reorganization following the 2025 AAO meeting:

- 1) **Practice Management Forms and Public Facing Brochures:** this subcommittee is ongoing. We have discussed some new potential additions/modifications to existing AAO practice management forms including a gingivectomy consent supplemental form, early termination of treatment form, and release of stl files consent form. Also, we have a project continuation from last year: release of a new informed consent video for orthodontic practices to show to patients.
- 2) **Workforce Shortages;** adequate hiring, training, and retention of all orthodontic office support staff continues to be a major concern of the AAO membership. Advocacy victories in several states have provided a pathway for less regulatory control in credentialing clinical assistants. Concurrently, there continues to be a need for training materials, especially for clinical staff, to satisfy state requirements that vary widely from one state to another. In the past, the AAO has provided a certification examination, the Specialized Orthodontic Assistant Examination, to provide a voluntary certification standard for clinical staff. COOP is recommending terminating this examination because the continued support and maintenance of this examination is not in the best interest of the AAO and its members at this time. The current focus is to develop a universal standard to define roles and responsibilities of orthodontic assistants. A task force, the Universal Guidelines for Orthodontic Assistants Task Force, consisting of COOP members and others has been formed at the request of AAO President Dr. Siegel to address this need.

At the Fall 2025 meeting, COOP initiated a formal motion to explore health insurance options for orthodontists and their staff. Members of COOP discussed problems with staff retention in part due to benefit packages, especially health insurance, that do not compete with larger employers. The AAO is currently exploring options for its members for malpractice coverage. Health insurance coverage may be investigated as well. There should be an update to this by Summer, 2026.

- 3) **Learning Transformation:** As part of the Learning Transformation project AAO leadership initiated last year to improve member access and customization to online learning, Dr. Siegel has commissioned the Learning Governance Committee as a standing committee to enable the sharing of accessible, consistent and reliable information. This committee will also steward the development of learning resources to position the AAO as the most trusted, centralized resource for orthodontic information. COOP will continue to work with other councils to facilitate this transformation.

- 4) Sustainability: Three years ago, Dr. Madeleine Goodman in her first year on COOP introduced the concept of AAO-supported recycling efforts, particularly items commonly used in orthodontic practices, such as aligners and resin models. She started Tiny Changes to initiate a way orthodontists could purchase plastics recycling boxes and fill them with used aligners and other plastics. The boxes are then sent to Teracycle for recycling. Because of the support of vendors and orthodontists, boxes may currently be purchased by U.S. and Canadian orthodontists for the reduced price of \$99. COOP has submitted a resolution to the 2026 AAO HOD requesting AAO funding and marketing support for this initiative.

It has been a pleasure to represent the GLAO to COOP and serve as the COOP chairperson for the past two years. We elected a new chairperson, Dr. Adam Welmerink and a new vice-chairperson, Dr. Nathan Hammon, to begin in these capacities following the 2026 AAO meeting. I will continue to serve as your COOP representative for the next two years.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lana Helms  
GLAO Representative to the Council on Orthodontic Practice