COC Summary for Fall – FY 2026-2027

The COC met in June, August, and October 2025, April 2026, and held its in-person meeting in February 2026.

CONSUMER AWARENESS PROGRAM (CAP) – FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026

The Consumer Awareness Program (CAP) continues to deliver record-breaking results as the AAO's only national advertising initiative dedicated to promoting orthodontists as specialists and encouraging consumers to seek in-person care.

FY 2025-26 Results

- **17.2 million** website visitors (+13%)
- **1 billion** ad impressions (+65%) – the number of people seeing our ads in channels like Google, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, paid search (Google & Bing), and Reddit
- **23+ million** ad clicks (+32%)
- **24+ million** page views (+27%)
- **7.6 million** Find an Orthodontist locator visits (+30%)

These results show that consumers aren't just seeing AAO messaging; they're actively engaging with it and taking the next step toward finding an orthodontist.

CONSUMER AWARENESS PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS FOR FY 2025-2026:

1. ***Straight Answers, Bright Smiles***: Launched in August 2025, this animated video series answers common consumer questions about orthodontics in a fun, engaging way. New episodes continue to be released every two months and have performed well across paid digital channels.
2. **Digital Agency Optimization:** Working with Steady Rain, CAP continued to improve website traffic, page views, clicks, and video performance while maintaining a flat media budget. Ongoing optimization has lowered costs and improved campaign efficiency.
3. **Search and Answer Engine Optimization (SEO/AEO):** As more consumers use AI platforms like ChatGPT and Google Gemini, the AAO continues developing and expanding consumer content to improve visibility in both traditional search engines and AI-generated search results.
4. **Targeted Influencer Outreach**
   The AAO developed consumer messaging with micro-influencers whose smaller but highly engaged audiences enable more authentic storytelling and more efficient use of marketing resources.
5. **Smiles at 7 Campaign:** The inaugural Smiles at 7 Day launched on July 7, 2025, to remind parents about the recommended age for a child's first orthodontic evaluation. The campaign included member resources, media outreach, and local promotional opportunities.
6. **Bullying Bites Campaign:** The seventh annual Bullying Bites campaign expanded national media outreach, partnerships, and member resources while continuing to promote kindness during National Bullying Prevention Month. The campaign generated more than 500 media placements with a potential audience of 165 million. Additional initiatives included illuminating more landmarks in the U.S. and Canada, expanding member resources, collaborating with the AAO Advocacy team to support

bipartisan mental health legislation, launching an enhanced partnership with Kind Lips, and renewing the partnership with Stand for the Silent.

New CAP initiatives for FY 2026-27

1. **NEW CAP Creative**
   Straight Answers, Bright Smiles will expand to include new seasonal and milestone-based topics, such as orthodontics improving confidence, airway, and orthodontic treatment before milestone events.
2. **NEW CAP outreach platform (in Beta testing)**
   Starting in June 2026, the AAO has begun beta testing sponsored ads on ChatGPT to reach consumers using AI search. Ads are clearly labeled, do not influence responses, and advertisers do not have access to user conversations. Early results have been encouraging.
3. **Search and Answer Engine Optimization**
   SEO and AEO remain priorities to ensure AAO content continues to appear prominently across traditional and AI-powered search platforms, reinforcing AAO's status as a trusted authority.
4. **Smiles at 7 Day Enhancements**
   The AAO will enhance *Smiles at 7 Day* by expanding member participation and activation and equipping practices with tools and resources to amplify local awareness and extend the campaign's impact beyond a single day.

MEMBER MARKETING HIGHLIGHTS FOR FY 2025-2026:

1. **Social Media Outreach:** AAO social media continued to grow, adding approximately 10,000 Instagram followers while exceeding engagement goals on all social channels. The team remains focused on expanding reach, creating engaging content, and consistently integrating key member messages.
2. **Member Branding Enhancements:** New AAO brand guidelines launched in late May 2026 with a more modern, member-focused look and messaging designed to better connect with different member audiences.
3. **eBulletin:** The weekly eBulletin continues to achieve open rates above 60% and remains a key source for AAO news. Stories are also promoted through Instagram and other social media channels.
4. **Member Minute:** The Member Minute video series continues to grow, featuring members sharing AAO news, events, advocacy updates, and member benefits through social media and eBulletin.
5. **Ortho Staff Outreach:** Continuing efforts to connect with members' office managers to communicate more easily, the quarterly ortho staff communication now reaches more than 7,500 office team members, helping practices stay informed about marketing campaigns and educational opportunities.
6. **Texting Initiative:** AAO text messaging continues to provide timely updates on important news, events, and member benefits.
7. **Member Website:** The marketing team continues improving the AAO member website to enhance accuracy, usability, and overall member experience.

New Member Marketing initiatives for FY 2026-27

1. **Social Media Outreach:** AAO launched an organic TikTok channel to complement CAP's paid efforts, educate consumers, counter misinformation, and expand its digital presence. The team will also continue producing new *What Makes Me Smile™* videos featuring international members.

2. **Member Branding Enhancements:** A refreshed AAO member website launched in late June 2026. It has a refreshed look with the new branding, fonts, and signature smiles. As we continue through FY 2026-27, additional enhancements will be made to the member website, including improved user experience, brand consistency, and member personalization.
3. **Weekly Email Newsletter:** Refreshed with a cleaner design, shorter articles, and COC approved a new name, The Wire, to better reflect timely industry news and updates. And the biggest opportunity with the new look and name change is that we get to reset member expectations.
4. **Member Communications:** With the new AAO brand messaging and ongoing Tech Transformation initiative, member emails will continue to evolve with more personalized content based on career stage, along with cleaner designs, stronger visuals, and shorter, more relevant messaging.