



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

## Dental Therapists HB1310

*An innovative solution for Washington's dental workforce shortage*

**Oral health is vital to overall health.** Left untreated, the pain and infection of dental disease can impact eating and speaking, disrupt employment and act as a barrier to a child's learning. **Dental disease is almost 100% preventable** yet too many people cannot access the care needed to avoid and treat it.

### Washington's critical need for increased access to dental care:

- In Washington, 35 of 39 counties do not have enough dental care providers.
- Dental complaints are the #1 non-emergent reason for non-insured adults to seek care at the emergency room.
- In 2005, 60% of Washington third graders had cavities.
- 52% of children enrolled in Apple Health for Kids are not receiving dental care.
- Nearly one-fifth of older adults, approximately 150,000 people, have untreated dental cavities.
- Nationwide, two dentists will retire for every one that graduates from school over the next decade—and in Washington, 35% plan to retire by 2017.
- Low-income kids, children of color, and non-English speaking kids experience higher levels of dental disease and untreated cavities.
- Almost 38% of Washington's adults have had teeth removed due to decay or gum disease.

**SUPPORT HB1310 – Dental Therapists work in partnership with dentists similar to the way nurse practitioners work with medical doctors to extend the care of the oral health team.**

**Dental therapist:** based on the model used in Alaska.

- Works as part of the dental team under the general supervision of a dentist which uses a “collaborative agreement” to outline the duties and protocol for the dental therapist.
- Trains for over 3,000 hours of intensive education and clinical experience on a focused set of procedures.
- Provides care that includes basic restorative services to relieve immediate pain and disease in patients while also able to provide preventative procedures and oral health education.
- Extends care under the general supervision of a dentist out of the dental office to the settings where there is a shortage of oral health care providers.

**Advanced dental therapist:** has a bachelor in dental hygiene with additional dental therapist training.

- Practice under a collaborative agreement without the general supervision of a dentist in an expanded list of settings.

**Our workforce shortage.** More dentists are needed, but they alone are not enough to fill the gap. Enhancing access through an affordable workforce that increases the productivity of the dental team, ensures that care reaches the underserved and produces enough providers to meet the need has to be part of the solution.

**The cost of not acting is too great.** Across Washington, ERs are providing inadequate and costly emergency care that does not address the causes of pain. Patients are facing financial barriers or unable to find providers willing to accept Medicaid. A recent report from Spokane County shows a dental-related ER visits have doubled over the last five years. With cuts in the state's adult dental services, the need will only grow.

**We need proven, innovative solutions.** Since the 1920s, in over 50 countries, **research studies have consistently shown that mid-level oral health practitioners improve access, reduce costs, provide excellent quality of care, and do not put patients at risk.** Now is the time for innovative solutions.

## Research on Mid-level Oral Health Practitioners

Mid-level dental practitioners have been well studied and researched in many countries and have a longstanding history around the world. The following is a list of major research studies on mid-level oral health practitioners. Among their findings:

### **Dental therapists provide results as safely and effectively as dentists.**

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- Nash DA, Friedman JW, Kardos TB, Kardos RL, Schwarz E, Satur J, Berg DG, Nasruddin J, Davenport EG, Nagel RJ. "Dental therapists: a global perspective." International Dental Journal. 2008; 58:61-70.
- Fiset, L. A Report on Quality Assessment of Primary Care Provided by Dental Therapists to Alaska Natives (Seattle, WA: University of Washington School of Dentistry, 2005).
- Lobene R, Kerr A. The Forsyth Experiment: An Alternative System for Dental Care (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).
- Abrose ER, Hord AB, Simpson WJ. A Quality Evaluation of Specific Dental Services Provided by the Saskatchewan Dental Plan. (Regina, Canada: Province of Saskatchewan Department of Health, 1976).
- Abramowitz J, Berg LE. "A four-year study of the utilization of dental assistants with expanded functions." Journal of the American Dental Association. 1973; 87:623-635.
- Brearley LJ, Rosenblum FN. "Two-year evaluation of auxiliaries trained in expanded duties." Journal of the American Dental Association. 1972; 84:600-610.
- Hammons PE, Jamison HC, Wilson LL. "Quality of service provided by dental therapists in an experimental program at the University of Alabama." Journal of the American Dental Association. 1971; 82:1060-1066
- Lotzkar S, Johnson DW, Thompson, MB. "Experimental program in expanded functions for dental assistants: Phase 3 experiment with dental teams." Journal of the American Dental Association. 1971; 82:1067-1081.

### **In areas where dental therapists have practiced for decades, there is a sharp decline in permanent tooth loss.**

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- Nash DA, Friedman JW, Kardos TB, Kardos RL, Schwarz E, Satur J, Berg DG, Nasruddin J, Davenport EG, Nagel RJ. "Dental therapists: a global perspective." International Dental Journal. 2008; 58:61-70.
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- Nash DA, Nagel RJ. "Confronting oral health disparities among American Indian/Alaska Native children: The pediatric oral health therapist." American Journal of Public Health. 2005; 95, no.8: 1325-1329.
- Mertz E, Anderson G, Grumbach K, O'Neil E. "Evaluation Strategies to Recruit Oral Health Care Providers to Underserved Areas of California." (San Francisco, CA: Center for California Health Workforce Studies, 2004).

### **Dental auxiliaries, like therapists, can reduce costs and increase net income when incorporated into a dentist's practice.**

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- Pew Center on the States, "It Takes A Team: How New Dental Providers Can Benefit Patients and Practices," [http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/State\\_policy/Report\\_It\\_Takes\\_a\\_Team\\_final.pdf](http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/State_policy/Report_It_Takes_a_Team_final.pdf) (December, 2010).
- Lobene R, Kerr A. The Forsyth Experiment: An Alternative System for Dental Care (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).
- Abramowitz J, Berg LE. "A four-year study of the utilization of dental assistants with expanded functions." Journal of the American Dental Association. 1973; 87:623-635.

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