LICENSING DENTAL THERAPIST IMPROVES HEALTH OUTCOMES

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?
The future prosperity of any society depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of all generations. When a society invests wisely in children, families, adults, the elderly and people with disabilities, the pay back is a lifetime of productivity and responsible citizenship. By ensuring all Floridians have oral health services available to them in their communities, the state will have healthier and more productive citizens.

WHAT IS STANDING IN THE WAY?
In most areas of Florida, dental care is in short supply which prevents people from getting the care they need. Expanding the dental team can increase access to dental care which affects the overall health of a person.

- 63 of 67 Florida counties (94%) include communities that have been designated as Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (DHPSA) by the federal government.¹
- 60% of Medicaid children – 1.4 million children – did not see a dentist in 2017.²
- 117,200 Floridians visited the emergency room for nontraumatic dental conditions, costing more than $500,000 in 2018.³

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?
One solution is to authorize the use of dental therapists in Florida. Dental therapists expand the dental team and can provide care directly to people in schools, nursing homes, and other community settings.

- 12 states have authorized dental therapy in all or some settings (AK, AZ, CT, ID, ME, MI, MN, NM, NV, OR, VT, WA); and
- 22 states are exploring dental therapy as an access solution (CA, CO, FL, GA, HI, IA, KS, KY, MA, MD, MO, MS, MT, NE, ND, OH, OK, ND, NH, TX, VA, WI).

Dental Therapy is an evidenced-based solution to increasing access. A review of 1,100 studies and assessments in the U.S. and other countries found that the quality of care delivered by a dental therapist is at least equal to that of a dentist for the procedures they have in common.⁴

WHAT CAN FLORIDA DO NOW?
Create an educated and licensed mid-level dental professional to supplement, not replace, dentists. This position is similar to medical mid-level providers who have enhanced care delivered by physicians. Increasing the number of trained dental professionals can expand access to oral health care.
**PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**Education:** The legislation requires graduation from an accredited program. The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) develops and implements accreditation standards to promote and monitor the continuous quality and improvement of dental professionals including dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants and dental therapists. CODA established dental therapy education standards in 2015.\(^5\)

- Three academic years **after** completing admission prerequisites;
- Advanced standing for registered dental hygienists (RDHs); RDH can complete additional dental therapy education in 14-16 months
- Graduates to be competent in a limited number of procedures. *Dentists provide approximately 434 procedures. Dental therapists would be allowed to provide approximately 80 procedures at the sole discretion of their supervising dentist*  

**Licensure:** The legislation requires dental therapist to complete the **same licensure requirements** as dentists and dental hygienists which are:

- Graduate from a program accredited by CODA;
- Pass a regional clinical examination (Dental and dental therapist students take the **same** exam with the **same** examiners for the procedures they both will be allowed to perform; and,
- Complete continuing education to renew their license.

**Supervision:** Dental therapists would practice under a collaborative management agreement with a supervising dentist. The agreement allows the **dentist** to determine how and where the dental therapist would practice.

**WORKFORCE PREPARATION**

Several colleges in the state’s System report they are equipped and ready to launch dental therapy programs to create a pipeline of qualified providers in Florida. State colleges can offer an affordable high-quality education for students to ensure they have a useful career path.

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http://hpsafind.hrsa.gov/HPSASearch.aspx

\(^2\) Data from form CMS-416 prepared by Scott Tomar, [www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/benefits/epsdt/index.html](http://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/benefits/epsdt/index.html)

\(^3\) Tomar, S. *Hospital Emergency Department and Hospital Inpatient Admissions in Florida for Non-Traumatic Dental Conditions, 2018.* Unpublished research.


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