

DENTAL THERAPY POSITION STATEMENT



The National Coaliton of
DENTISTS *for*
HEALTH EQUITY

The National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity supports and promotes evidence-based, high quality, and cost-effective oral health service delivery, specifically innovative workforce efforts demonstrated to address disparities of access to dental care.

To achieve this goal, the Coalition endorses the addition of dental therapists as integral members of the oral health care team in the United States to increase access to dental care, expand access to dental education opportunities and diversify the profession.

Across the nation, access to oral health services remains one of the greatest unmet health needs for children and low-income adults. As a result, these populations suffer from a disproportionate burden of poor oral health outcomes which in turn contributes to unnecessary pain and preventable infections, higher healthcare costs, lost productivity and lost wages, and poor overall health outcomes including death.

A myriad of systemic barriers including social, cultural, economic and geographic factors lead to gross inequities in the oral health care delivery system. However, the largest barrier is the inadequate dental workforce that leaves many rural, urban and tribal communities without adequate access to care.

Although a multifaceted solution is necessary to fully address this issue, the utilization of dental therapists has demonstrated increased access to high quality, cost-effective, culturally appropriate and affordable care for historically underserved populations.

Dental therapists are highly trained licensed or certified dental care professionals who provide community education and preventive services and perform some of the most common dental procedures such as preparing and filling cavities. They work as part of a dentist-led team, extending the reach of dentists and significantly increasing access to care for members of underserved populations.

Dental therapists are currently authorized in some or all settings in twelve states. Seven additional states have considered or are still considering dental therapy legislation in their 2019 legislative sessions.

THE COALITION:

- Recommends necessary changes in federal, state and local laws, policies and guidelines to allow for the broader implementation and practice of dental therapy;
- Encourages efforts to educate public health and other health professionals, decision makers and the public on the integration of dental therapy into oral health care delivery;
- Supports efforts to provide consistency in the licensure or certification of dental therapists as well as dental therapist education based on standards created by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA), the same body which creates accreditation standards for dental and dentist hygienist education programs, and will support robust dental therapy programs based on CODA standards.



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VISION: THAT ALL PERSONS IN THE U.S. REGARDLESS OF AGE, RACE, INCOME, GENDER, GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION, AND ABILITIES SHALL HAVE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE, PRIMARY CARE INCLUDING ORAL DISEASE PREVENTION AND TREATMENT SERVICES.