

# Dental Therapy 101

Improving Access to Care | Advancing Racial and Economic Justice

Across the U.S., nearly **70 million people** live in areas without enough dental providers.

As a result, many people — particularly BIPOC communities, low-income families, and rural communities — don't have access to the dental care they need to support their oral and overall health.

This can have **cascading effects**, such as:

Causing other health complications

Interfering with work and school

Threatening family economic stability

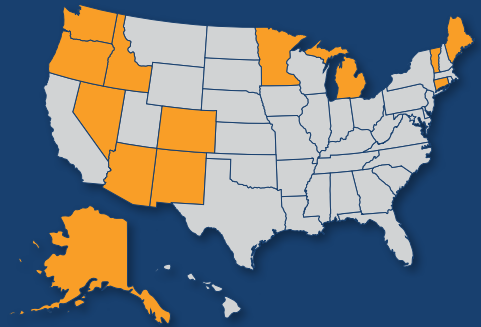
Straining state budgets

## What are dental therapists?

Dental therapists are licensed providers who work under the supervision of a dentist to provide care like fillings and exams.

Dental therapy was initially brought to the U.S. by Alaska Native leaders seeking to address provider shortages by homegrowing their own providers.

Dental therapists have spread across the country and are now authorized to practice in at least some settings in 13 states.



## How can dental therapists help?

Dental therapy is a proven, evidence-based strategy to cost-effectively increase access to care while building a more representative workforce.

Training for dental therapists is shorter and less expensive than that of dentists, making the education more accessible.

Working under general supervision, dental therapists provide care in community settings, including mobile clinics, long-term care facilities, and schools.

Dental therapists are a flexible addition to a dentist-led team, skilled in:



Using telehealth technology



Providing the most commonly need treatments



Complementing the work of hygienists and dental assistants



National  
Partnership for  
Dental Therapy

# Transforming care delivery and oral health equity

Dental therapy is a well-rounded solution to access problems and presents opportunities to address oral health equity and advance economic justice.

## Dental Therapists:

ARE A COST-EFFECTIVE  
SOLUTION



Because the costs of employing a dental therapist are about 1/3 to 1/2 that of a dentist, hiring them is an affordable way to treat more low-income and uninsured patients.

They **help clinics serve more patients** with the same budget and can divert costly emergency room usage for dental problems.

IMPROVE ACCESS TO CARE  
IN THE COMMUNITIES  
WHERE THEY WORK



They create more opportunities for people to see a provider and **provide early treatment and prevention** to avoid more painful and invasive care in the future.

IMPROVE QUALITY OF  
CARE AND PATIENT  
EXPERIENCE



Community members who receive care from dental therapists have more knowledge about oral health and are **highly satisfied with the quality of care.**

Where dental therapists practice, patients **wait less time for appointments and have shorter travel times** to clinics, especially in rural areas.

CREATE ECONOMIC  
AND EDUCATIONAL  
OPPORTUNITIES



Because dental therapists do a narrow set of commonly needed procedures, they can be trained in far less time and at far less cost than a dentist.

This allows **local colleges to build accessible workforce pipelines** that foster good paying jobs and better oral health.

CAN HELP BRIDGE  
LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL  
GAPS THAT LEAD TO  
HEALTH INEQUITIES



Accessible education means that dental therapists are more likely to be from the communities they serve.

Patients also have better experiences and health outcomes when **providers share their culture.**

The oral health crisis in the U.S. is a complex problem that will require multi-faceted solutions to improve oral health coverage, integrate dental and medical systems, and **address structural racism in dentistry.**

No one policy will solve this crisis, but dental therapists are an evidence-based means of increasing access to care, improving health outcomes, and fostering economic stability in families and communities.

Get to know dental therapy at [DentalTherapy.org](https://DentalTherapy.org).