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
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.

### Dental Therapists:

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<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>Are a cost-effective solution</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>Improve access to care in the communities where they work</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>Improve quality of care and patient experience</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>Create economic and educational opportunities</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>Can help bridge language and cultural gaps that lead to health inequities</td>
<td>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.</td>
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