



Ascension



Support for Legislation Authorizing Licensure of Dental Therapists

The connection between oral health and overall health is well documented, and Wisconsin is lagging in several oral health indicators, especially for children. Advocates agree that authorizing licensure of Dental Therapists in Wisconsin would directly improve access to care in our state. Recent annual data show that less than one-third of individuals under the age of 21 enrolled in Wisconsin's Medical Assistance program received preventative dental services. There are numerous documented cases across the country of patients dying because of preventable dental infections going untreated, and sadly many patients experiencing oral health pain and decay miss work and school due to preventable oral health issues. Further, untreated oral health issues cause costly emergency room visits. In Wisconsin, nearly 23,000 emergency room visits for preventable dental conditions were reported in 2019.

The authorization of Dental Therapists in Wisconsin is an important step to improve access to dental care. There is no one silver bullet that will fix this problem. However, our neighbors in Minnesota have allowed dental therapists to practice and have well documented the success this change has made. There are currently 13 states that have authorized the practice of Dental Therapy across the country and it's time Wisconsin is added to this list of innovators.

The coalition of organizations supporting Dental Therapy in Wisconsin is broad, including disability rights organizations, a free-market think tank, primary care clinics, hospitals, insurers, and community-based service providers. We encourage state lawmakers to pass Dental Therapy legislation as an important tool to improve oral health in Wisconsin. The undersigned draw your attention to the following elements of the legislation:

1. Dental Therapists are intended to be a member of the dental team and not work independent of a Dentist. Wisconsin's Dental Therapy legislation requires a licensed Dental Therapist, after the completion of their education and receiving their license, to practice under direct or indirect supervision for 2,000 hours before they can practice under general supervision. Dental Therapists are required to enter into a collaborative management agreement with a licensed Dentist. This allows the Dental Therapist and Dentist to collaborate on treatment planning and the provision of care. This model is working well in Minnesota with more than 100 licensed Dental Therapists practicing across the state since the first dental therapist graduates in 2011 became licensed.
2. Dental Therapists are well trained and educated. The Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) adopted standards for Dental Therapy education in 2016. CODA ensures Dental Therapy training programs educate their graduates to meet a level of competency in the services which they will be providing. CODA has recently granted accreditation to programs in Alaska, Oregon, and Minnesota.
3. To support improved access to dental care for those populations that are currently most severely impacted by provider shortages and poor oral health outcomes, Wisconsin's Dental Therapy legislation requires that Dental Therapists practice in a dental health professional shortage area or provide care to special populations. "Special populations" as defined by the bill include a patient base where at least 50% of clients served are from any of the following groups: Medical assistance patients, uninsured patients, patients at free and charitable clinics, patients at Federally Qualified Health Centers, individuals who reside in long term care facilities, patients who



are members of federally recognized tribe or band or those residing on tribal lands, veterans, and patients that have a medical disability or chronic condition limiting their access to dental care.

4. Dental Therapists, similar to Physician Assistants on a medical team, provide cost-effective preventive and routine restorative care. Dentists in Minnesota who have hired Dental Therapists are seeing more patients and have increased revenue. A 2014 report released by the Minnesota Board of Dentistry and Department of Health shared in addition to more patients being seen, more than 80% of new patients seen by Dental Therapists were publicly insured. Patients experienced less travel time and decreased wait times. More recent estimates in Minnesota show dental therapists have provided more than 107,600 patient visits.

5. With a CODA accredited dental school and eight CODA accredited dental hygiene schools in Wisconsin, there is already an educational infrastructure to explore training programs in our state. Several technical colleges have already expressed interest in developing training programs once Wisconsin's legislation is passed.

For these reasons, our organizations support Dental Therapy in Wisconsin. Dental Therapists will be well educated, trained, licensed and provide high quality and most importantly much needed care to many in Wisconsin who currently lack access to dental care. We urge you to authorize Dental Therapy in Wisconsin. Sincerely,

- Access Community Health Centers
- American Family Children's Hospital
- Alliance of Health Insurers
- Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield of Wisconsin
- Ascension
- Bad River Health and Wellness Center
- Badger Institute
- Disability Service Provider Network
- Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin
- Children's Wisconsin
- Delta Dental of Wisconsin
- Kids Forward
- Minnesota Dental Therapy Association
- Oneida Nation
- Penfield Children's Center
- Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative
- Sixteenth Street
- Social Development Commission
- Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program, Inc.
- UW Health
- UW Health Kids
- The Arc Wisconsin
- Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition
- Wisconsin Association of Health Plans
- Wisconsin Association of Free and Charitable Clinics
- Wisconsin Assisted Living Association
- Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards
- Wisconsin Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics
- Wisconsin Dental Hygienists' Association
- Wisconsin Hospital Association
- Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association
- Wisconsin Public Health Association