

FLORIDIANS for DENTAL ACCESS



THE ISSUE

Florida is in a dental shortage crisis.

Currently, Florida has the greatest projected shortfall of dentists in the nation. Roughly one in four – more than five million – Floridians live in areas the federal government has reported face dentist shortages. In fact, 63 of Florida's 67 counties have at least one shortage area.

THE SOLUTION

Authorize dental therapists in the State of Florida.

Authorizing dental therapists in the State of Florida would expand access to quality oral health care to people living in identified dentist shortage areas.

Much of the consequences of dental disease – pain, missed school and work days – are due to untreated decay. Under Florida law, only dentists are allowed to fill cavities; but, by authorizing a new, mid-level dental provider, there would be a dramatic increase in the number of highly trained professionals able to perform basic procedures under the supervision of a dentist.

Ultimately, introducing dental therapists to the State of Florida would expand access to dental care to those living in rural areas, those who find it difficult to travel to a dentist, children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Health Professional Shortage Areas: Dental Care by County - Florida, 2017



**63 of Florida's 67 Counties have
Dental Care Health Professional
Shortage Areas**

**Authorize Dental Therapists
in Florida Now**

None of county is shortage area

Part of county is shortage area

THE LEGISLATION

Adopt effective public policy that expands access to high-quality dental care.

The forthcoming bills, sponsored by Senator Jeff Brandes (R-St. Petersburg) and Representative Rene Plasencia (R-Orlando) would authorize the use of dental therapists to effectively expand access to high-quality dental care.

The legislation would allow dentists to treat more patients by hiring dental therapists, similar to a physician assistant on a medical team, to provide cost-effective preventive and routine restorative care.

Training

To ensure the highest level of care, the bill mandates that dental therapists be trained according to national standards developed by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) – the accrediting

body housed within the American Dental Association – that is recognized as the nationally accepted level of safety and quality.

The legislation also requires students to graduate with an undergraduate degree from a CODA accredited program or one that the Dental Board finds meets these same standards. A number of Florida colleges report they are equipped and ready to launch dental therapy training programs to create a pipeline of qualified providers in Florida.

Supervision

Under the bills, dental therapists, after training directly with their dentist for a certain amount of time, would then be able to practice under general supervision, meaning that, while dental therapists would be required to consult with the dentist overseeing them, the dentist would not have to be present while the dental therapist is treating patients.

Importantly, practicing under general supervision would allow dental therapists to be sent to nursing homes, schools, facilities for people with disabilities, rural satellite clinics and other places serving people who face obstacles travelling to receive care. With a supervising dentist in a hub office, a dental therapist could seek guidance, when necessary, via phone, and share x-rays and patient records via telehealth technology.

Additionally, under this policy, dentists would determine whether the dental therapists they supervise should have more restrictive supervision, or a smaller number of allowable procedures, than outlined in state law.

Cost

A practice's cost of providing care in locations with traditionally restricted access to dental care would be much more affordable without the need for a dentist's presence.

Often, government proposals to expand health care do so at a significant cost to taxpayers; yet, authorizing dental therapists would not require a new line item in the state budget.

BOTTOM LINE

Dental therapists can help solve the dental shortage crisis in Florida.

By authorizing dental therapists, Floridians would have better access to high-quality, routine dental care, lessening the dental shortage crisis that currently effects the State of Florida and more than five million citizens.