

THE ISSUE

As state lawmakers, advocates, and community leaders work to improve the value of health care and address broader health disparities throughout the nation, their efforts must include multiple strategies to reduce disparities in access to timely dental care.

THE PROBLEM

Thousands of Floridians face significant barriers to obtaining the basic dental care they need to achieve good oral and overall health. As a result, more and more people are visiting emergency room departments due to preventable dental infections. When in the emergency room, physicians do not treat the underlying issue; instead, they prescribe pain medication and antibiotics. These patients then continue to struggle with untreated dental disease that can have far-reaching, serious effects on their overall health and can lead to other systemic complications.

Facts:

- In 2018, more than 117,200 people visited the emergency room for preventable dental conditions;
- 4,029 of those patients were admitted, to the hospital;
- Resulting in \$525,198,796 charges.¹

As stated in the landmark 2000 Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health in America, "oral health is integral to overall health."²

THE SOLUTION

When the crisis is systemic, it takes multiple solutions. One solution is midlevel dental providers, known as dental therapists, who provide basic dental care to underserved and uninsured patients under the supervision by a dentist. 12 states now allow a dentist to hire a dental therapist, and Florida will be reintroducing legislation during the 2020 Legislative Session to authorize dental therapists to practice in the state. **Please support SB152 sponsored by Senator Brandes and HB979 sponsored by Representative Plasencia.**

EDUCATION, LICENSURE & PRACTICE

- In September 2015, the American Dental Association's Commission on Dental Accreditation approved standards for dental therapy education.³
- Dental therapists are educated to the same national standards as dentists and dental hygienists, in an accredited institution, for the services they are authorized to provide.
- Dental therapists take the same state clinical licensure exam alongside dental candidates for the procedures they both perform.
- Dental therapists will be licensed and regulated by the Florida Board of Dentistry.
- All dental therapists must be supervised by a licensed Florida dentist.
- Practice settings will be limited to improve access for low-income, uninsured patients and communities or in practice settings where at least 50 percent of their patients are be on Medicaid or a similar Government-run program.
- Licensed dental therapists would perform preventive, basic fillings and simple extractions of baby teeth, not adult teeth.

QUICK FACTS

In 2018, more than 117,200 people visited the emergency room for preventable dental conditions, resulting in \$525,198,796 in charges

Emergency rooms DO NOT treat dental infections

Periodic volunteer efforts, while admirable, can't fix the problem alone

Dental therapists are educated by the same accrediting institutions as dentists

Dental therapy candidates take the same state clinical licensure exam alongside dental candidates for common procedures

¹ Tomar, S. Hospital Emergency Department and Hospital Inpatient Admissions in Florida for Non-Traumatic Dental Conditions, 2005-2018. Unpublished research.

² US Department of Health and Human Services. Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General—Executive Summary. Rockville, MD: National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research; 2000.

³ CODA Accredited Standards for Dental Therapy Educational Programs, 2015. https://www.ada.org/~media/CODA/Files/dental_therapy_standards.pdf?la=en



This is a broad-based coalition of state and local agencies as well as public and private organizations that recognize the need to improve dental access to all Florida residents. The coalition was formed in 2017 and continues to expand. The group supports the establishment of a new licensed mid-level dental provider called a Dental Therapist.

- 4Generations Institute
- Alachua County Commission
- Alachua County Oral Health Coalition
- Bond Community Health Center
- Broward Community & Family Health Centers
- Catalyst Miami
- Center for Oral Health
- Central Florida Health Care
- Children's Services Council of Palm Beach
- Children's Volunteer Health Network
- Community Health Center of Florida
- Community Health Centers of Pinellas
- Families USA
- Florida Allied Dental Educators
- Florida Association of Children's Hospitals
- Florida Association of Community Health Ctrs.
- Florida Chamber of Commerce
- Florida Dental Hygienists' Association
- Florida Head Start State Collaboration Office
- Florida Keys AHEC
- Florida Legal Services Inc.
- Florida Philanthropic Network/Florida Health Funders
- Florida Policy Institute
- Florida Public Health Association
- Florida Rural Health Association
- Florida Voices for Health
- GNV4ALL
- Greater Tampa Bay Oral Health Coalition
- Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida
- Health-First
- Heart of Florida Health Center
- Hillsborough County Commission
- James Madison Institute
- League of Woman Voters of Florida
- Marion County Hospital District
- Miami Dade College
- Munroe Regional Health System
- National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity
- National Indian Health Board
- North Florida Medical Centers, Inc.
- Oral Heath Florida
- Palm Beach County Commission
- Palm Beach County Partnership for Aging
- Palm Beach County Oral Health Coalition
- Palms Medical Group
- Partnership for Child's Health
- Premier Community Health Centers
- South East American Indian Council, Inc.
- Suncoast Community Health Centers
- Suwannee River AHEC
- The Brevard Health Alliance
- The Children's' Movement of Florida
- The Local Health Council of East Central Florida, Inc.
- The Pew Charitable Trust
- United Way of Florida
- United Way of North Central Florida
- Well Florida
- West Orange Dental Alliance

For more information, please visit the Floridians for Dental Access website at www.floridiansfordentalaccess.com