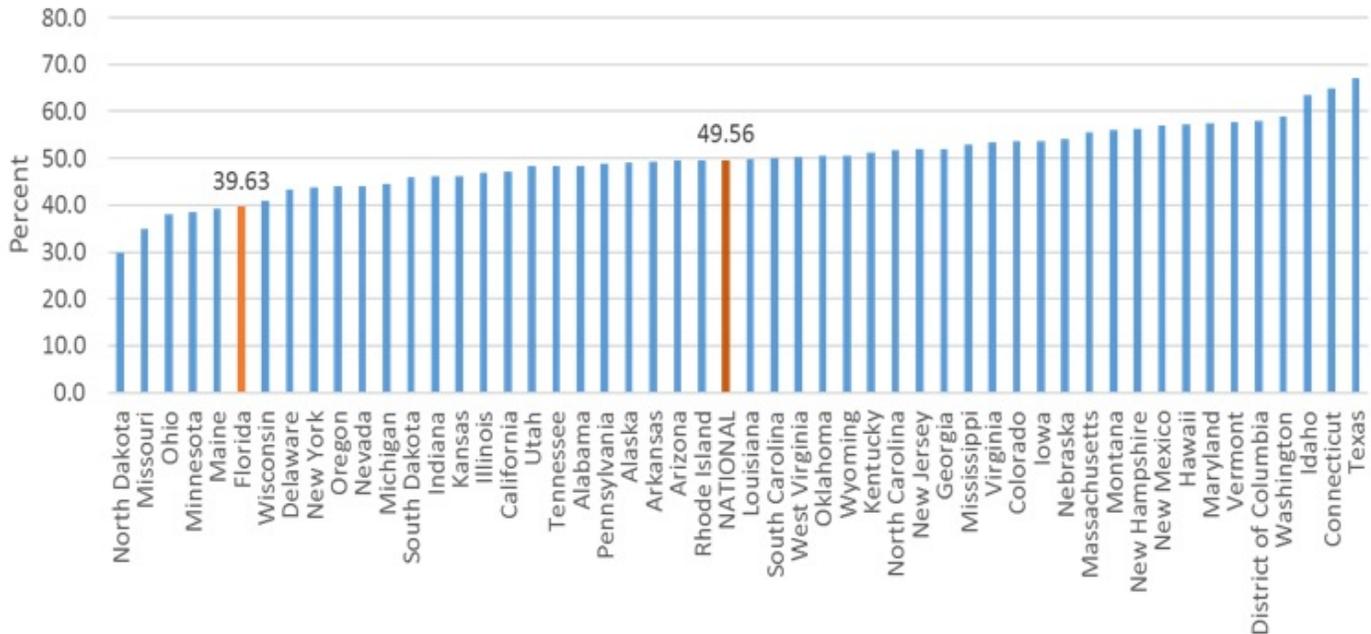


## PROBLEM: CHILDREN IN FLORIDA LACK ORAL HEALTH CARE

- Only 39-40 percent of Medicaid-eligible children in Florida received any dental service in Fiscal Year 2017.
- As there are more than 2.7 million children eligible for Medicaid in Florida, this means more than 1.7 million children on Medicaid did not receive any dental services in Florida in Fiscal Year 2017.

*Percentage of Medicaid-eligible children receiving any dental, Fiscal Year 2017*



## WHY IS ACCESS TO ORAL HEALTH CARE FOR CHILDREN SO IMPORTANT?

A number of published studies over the past decade have documented a strong relationship between poor oral health and school performance.

- Children with poor oral health are more likely to experience oral pain, miss school and are more than twice as likely to perform poorly in school.
- Preventing and treating children's oral health problems improves functioning, educational achievement and psychosocial development.
- Developmental delays among preschool-aged children from low-income families may be associated with increased decay, missing and fillings on primary teeth.
- Among children and adolescents ages 5-18, oral pain and acute asthma similarly impact school attendance.
- Absences associated with oral pain or infection increase the likelihood of poor school performance, whereas absences for routine oral health care do not.

## SOLUTION: SCHOOL-BASED ORAL CARE DELIVERY VIA DENTAL THERAPISTS

School-based health centers are an ideal setting to meet the oral health care needs of school-aged children, especially those who may come from vulnerable populations, such as children from low-income families, as school-based health centers deliver on-the-spot care in a convenient, affordable manner.

While the state of children's oral health could be significantly improved by utilizing school-based oral health services and it is a recommended strategy to help increase the availability of oral health care, traditional dentists may be too expensive. Dental therapists, however, have lower costs for delivering high quality dental care.

In Minneapolis, Children's Dental Service ([childrensdentalservices.org](http://childrensdentalservices.org)) relies on dental therapists to provide dental care to children in more than 630 sites across the state, primarily in schools. Dental therapists deliver care through convenient, affordable, efficient and cost-effective mobile oral health care programs, which reduce barriers, such as transportation and financial hardship.

- School-based health centers help vulnerable populations who experience the greatest likelihood of being underinsured or uninsured and face significant challenges to access health care.
- By implementing oral health services into school-based health centers, students at all grade levels could see improved academic performance and better quality of life.
- Children from low-income families could significantly decrease their risk for dental caries and onset of new diseases by utilizing school-based oral health programs and following the risk-based care recommended guidelines.
- School-based oral health programs that deliver care with non-traditional workforce models could be an impactful method of improving oral health in children of low-income families.

*Reference: National Maternal and Child Health Resource Center*

## WHAT ARE DENTAL THERAPISTS?

Dental therapists are midlevel providers who provide basic dental care to underserved and uninsured patients under the supervision of a dentist. Twelve states now allow a dentist to hire a dental therapist, and Florida has reintroduced legislation during the 2020 Legislative Session, Senate Bill 152 and House Bill 979, to authorize dental therapists in our state.

Dental therapists can practice under supervision, meaning they are able to deliver care in community-based settings which enables interventions long before someone reaches the emergency room. Further, working in community-based settings means dental therapists could serve children in schools and bring on-the-spot care to children who may currently lack access to quality oral health care.

Dental therapists are formally trained to the same national standards as a dentist for the limited procedures they may perform, such as fillings, stainless steel crowns, pulpotomies, cleanings, sealants and application of fluoride products. They must also pass the same state clinical licensing exam, sitting next to dental candidates for the procedures they have in common, then apply to the Florida Board of Dentistry for licensure.

### LEARN MORE

*Floridians for Dental Access is a bipartisan coalition of 54 local, state and national groups and organizations who see every day how vulnerable populations in our state struggle to be seen by a dentist. Together, we support bringing affordable dental care to these populations by authorizing dental therapists. To learn more, or for additional resources, please contact Coalition Coordinator Cathy Cabanzon at [floridiansfordentalaccess@gmail.com](mailto:floridiansfordentalaccess@gmail.com), or visit our website at [floridiansfordentalaccess.com](http://floridiansfordentalaccess.com).*