

### Support for SB 181 – Licensure of Dental Therapists



Ascension



Leading experts agree and data shows that nationally Wisconsin ranks 43rd in access to dental care for children. The connection between oral health and overall health is well documented and advocates agree SB 181 would directly improve access to care in our state. There are numerous documented cases across the country of patients dying, including 12-year-old Diamonte Driver in Maryland, because of preventable dental infections going untreated, and spreading to their brains or other organs. We do not want to see this in Wisconsin.

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 12 states that have authorized the practice of dental therapy across the country and it's time Wisconsin is added to this list of innovators.

There are several important aspects of this legislation that should be understood.

1) Dental therapists are intended to be a member of the dental team and not work independent of a dentist. SB 181 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 therapist and dentist to collaborate on treatment planning and the provision of care. This model is working well in Minnesota with nearly 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 is the same body that accredits dental and dental hygiene schools across the country. CODA ensures dental therapy training programs educate their graduates to meet a level of competency in the services which they will be providing. Dental therapists in Wisconsin would be required to graduate from a CODA accredited training program, one approved by the Minnesota Board of Dentistry or one approved by the Wisconsin Dentistry Examining Board.

3) In efforts to increase access to dental care, dental therapists in Wisconsin are required to practice in a dental health professional shortage area or provide care to a population made up of at least 50% who are in any of the following groups: Medical assistance patients, uninsured patients, patients at free and charitable clinics, patients at federally qualified health centers, patients 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 a physician assistant 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 percent of new patients seen by dental therapists were publically 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) In August 2020, Ilisagvik College in Alaska became the first CODA Accredited Dental Therapy program in the nation. Dental therapists are currently being trained at two institutions in Minnesota including the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry and Metropolitan State University (in conjunction with Normandale Community College). In the fall of 2021, University of Minnesota Mankato will begin training its first class after receiving approval from the Minnesota Board of Dentistry. Vermont Technical College plans to submit for CODA accreditation in early 2021 and will admit its first class in fall of 2022. 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.

6) In Wisconsin nearly 23,000 emergency room visits for preventable dental conditions were reported in 2019. Typically emergency rooms stabilize patients with antibiotics and pain medication but ultimately patients need to find a dentist for treatment of the larger issue at hand. Emergency rooms across Wisconsin are working to coordinate follow up care for patients however finding dentists willing to accept patients on Medicaid can be challenging.

It is for these reasons our organizations have joined together to 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 support SB 181 and authorize dental therapy in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

- American Family Children's Hospital
- Alliance of Health Insurers
- Anthem, Inc.
- Ascension
- 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
- Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program, Inc.
- University of Wisconsin Health
- The Arc Wisconsin
- Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition
- Wisconsin Association of Free and Charitable Clinics
- Wisconsin Assisted Living Association
- Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards
- Wisconsin Dental Hygienists' Association
- Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association
- Wisconsin Public Health Association