



Bringing Dental Therapists to Kansas

Establishing dental therapists will create jobs, ensure that Kansans have access to regular dental care, and save money. Kansas should add dental therapists to the dental team.

Why do we need dental therapists?

A gap in the dental workforce leaves 83 percent of Kansas counties without enough dental providers, affecting rural and urban communities, businesses, and families, regardless of where they live or if they are insured. Physician assistants and nurse practitioners have already helped address the medical workforce shortage, and dental therapists will do the same for the dental workforce.

What is a dental therapist?

Dental therapists will work under the supervision of a dentist to provide routine and preventive care – like cleanings, fillings, and simple extractions. They will work in dental offices and community settings, such as nursing homes and schools.

Dental hygienists will train to become dental therapists through programs accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation - the same agency that accredits programs for dentists and dental hygienists. ***Dental therapists will pass a comprehensive clinical exam.***

Other states and 52 other countries are using this model to address dental workforce shortages. ***Every study conducted on providers like dental therapists shows they provide safe, quality care to patients.***

Creating Jobs

Dental therapists will allow dentists to grow their practices and treat more patients. By employing just one dental therapist, a dental practice will be able to earn an additional profit of \$125,000 annually.

Graduates of dental therapy education programs will be prepared to work in good paying jobs. Dental therapists will be trained right here in Kansas and can return to their hometowns to work. Hygienists will have the opportunity to learn new skills and advance their careers. Allowing hygienists to expand their skill sets will benefit their careers, patients, and the dental practices where they work.

Ensuring healthy Kansans

Hundreds of thousands of Kansans lack access to dental care. Untreated dental problems often lead to major medical problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, and stroke. With more dental providers in our state, Kansans can prevent these oral health problems and avoid costly emergency care.

Senior citizens, people with disabilities, and children are particularly affected. For children, poor dental health leads to lifelong medical problems and can inhibit their ability to learn. Tooth decay is the number one chronic childhood illness - five times more prevalent than asthma. ***By adding dental therapists to the dental team, more adults and children will have reliable access to routine, preventive oral health care.***

Providing cost-effective care

The dental workforce shortage affects all Kansans, whether it's through higher costs for dental services, increased insurance premiums, or the growing burden of uncompensated care on community hospitals and clinics.

Dental therapists will be able to provide some of the same routine care dentists provide now at a fraction of the cost. Adding a dental therapist to the dental workforce frees up dentists to focus on the more complex procedures, allowing the entire team to operate more efficiently. This is especially beneficial for Kansas' safety net clinics, which will be able to utilize state dollars more efficiently.

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

"As a dentist in a Kansas safety net clinic, I see firsthand the overwhelming need that exists for quality dental care. Adding dental therapists to our dental team will allow us to better address that need and provide high-quality care to more Kansans."

*—Dr. Mollie Day, DDS
Heartland Community
Health Center Dental
Director*

"These practitioners will make it easier and more affordable for underserved populations, including elderly people, to obtain high-quality oral care. At the same time, this will free up dentists for more complex procedures."

—AARP

"Dental therapists will strengthen the dental workforce, allowing dentists to grow their businesses and meet demand at no cost to the state. AFP-Kansas supports legislation to approve dental therapists in Kansas as an opportunity to support job creation, business growth and fiscal responsibility."

*—Americans for
Prosperity, Kansas Chapter*