

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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**Tuesday, October 9, 2018**

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### **Santa Fe County Commissioners Unanimously Pass Resolution in Support of Dental Therapists**

**Santa Fe, NM** – The Santa Fe County Board of Commissioners unanimously voted to pass a resolution that supports legislation in the 2019 legislative session that would allow the training and licensure of dental therapists in New Mexico. The resolution was passed on Tuesday, October 9th. Dental therapists are licensed mid-level dental care professionals who can perform preventative and restorative services such as cleaning and fillings and can promote oral health and reduce related health risks.

The lack of access to quality dental care is a major problem in New Mexico, especially in rural and underserved areas without enough - if any - dentists. In Santa Fe County, over half of indigent residents had not seen a dentist in 2015-2016. Dental problems can lead to serious health risks if they are left untreated, including heart disease, blood clots, brain infections and diabetes, but these problems can be prevented if people have regular access to routine dental care.

"The Dental Therapist project will not only bring life-saving oral health care to our underserved communities, especially our children and elders. It will also provide careers with a future to keep our best and brightest here in Santa Fe County," said Santa Fe County Commissioner Chair Anna Hansen, who sponsored the resolution.

Dental therapists are backed by more than 50 organizations across New Mexico, ranging from community-based groups to dentists and dental hygienists to school-based health centers.

"Studies continue to find links between oral health and overall health and New Mexico families need access to quality dental care to be healthy. Santa Fe County is showing that it recognizes the seriousness of this issue and the promise of dental therapists by passing this resolution," said Barbara Webber, Executive Director of Health Action NM.

Earlier this year, Arizona [passed](#) legislation authorizing dental therapists. Dental therapists have been working as part of the dental team in [Minnesota](#) for seven years and in Alaska for more than a decade. Results from a 2017 study in Alaska [study found](#) that communities with access to dental therapists' services resulted in greater use of preventive dental services and fewer extractions among adults and children. In addition, fewer children with more access required extractions of their four front teeth. This means kids are suffering less by getting care sooner—that saves money and saves kids from pain and the trauma more invasive care.

The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community in Washington State is employing dental therapists and the providers are working in Oregon under a statewide pilot program.

The NM Dental Therapist Coalition will present to the NM Legislative Health and Human Services Committee on Friday October 12th from 2:30 PM - 4 PM at the State Capitol, Room 322.

*Health Action New Mexico is a consumer advocacy non-profit organization that focuses on bringing all New Mexico communities access to quality healthcare services. For more information, visit [www.healthactionnm.org](http://www.healthactionnm.org).*