

Dental Therapists

A Community Workforce Solution for Improving
Access to Quality Dental Care
for Rural, Tribal & Underserved New Mexico

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NM Dental Health Crisis

- NM 49th worst in U.S. in number of dentists/1,000 people.
 - 69% of dentists in NM metropolitan areas.
 - Aging dentist workforce: 30% age 60+
- 34% of all NM 3rd graders have untreated dental decay, worse for NA population.
- Thousands of New Mexicans –children, elders & persons with disabilities – do not have access to, or wait > 6 months for necessary dental care.
 - **Result:** Living in pain, missing school or work, low school performance, lost work productivity, life threatening medical emergencies, long-term serious health problems.
 - Over 2,000 New Mexicans stood in line for days for free dental services at the two-day NM Mission of Mercy dental clinic. (Oct. 2010, March 2012)
- Fewer dentists are taking Medicaid patients. Very few dentists include Medicaid patients as a significant portion of their patient mix.
- Demand will only increase: Federal law mandates dental coverage for children up to 21 yrs.

Who are Dental Therapists?

- Dental providers, general supervision of off-site dentists, study after study show provide high quality, cost-effective dental services to rural and tribal communities. (*April 2012, Review of Global Literature on Dental Therapists, David A. Nash*)
- Home-grown, culturally competent, selected by their communities, practice in their home or similarly situated communities.
- Obtain nearly 3 years of rigorous, competency-based education, training and clinical experience.
- Expand the reach of dentists to underserved and remote communities using telemedicine.
- Financially sustainable workforce model: Provide a range of billable, routine treatment and restorative care services as well as prevention and education services..
 - Can increase a dentist's productivity and profitability, including adding a 20% Medicaid patient mix. (*The Pew Center, Dec. 2010*)
- Since 2005, provided care in remote Alaskan tribal villages. Over 90 years, provided care in 50 countries including industrialized countries.

A Workforce Solution for NM

- **State Law Change Required to Restore Tribal Sovereignty and Rural Community Right to Self-Determination** - For NM rural communities, tribes, pueblos and nation to have the right to train and employ a dental therapist, NM state law must specifically allow dental therapists to practice in NM. Federal law took away these communities' rights to have dental therapists.
- **Economic Opportunity & Career Pathways**
 - Career, jobs and economic opportunities for those in rural and tribal NM.
 - Possible career pathway for dental hygienists – With a minimum additional year of training dental hygienists can become dental therapists. This means providers serving the public sooner.

Dental Therapists: An Innovative, Tested Model for NM

- Proposals for a NM Dental Therapist program are not new to NM.
 - 2008 – Presentation to Interim HHS Cmte.
 - Jan. 2011 - Introduced HB 495, dental therapist legislation for the 2011 NM legislative session
 - Oct. 2011 -Proposal presented to Indian Affairs Cmte.
 - 2012 – Proposal presented to Interim HHS Cmte.
 - 2013 – Introduce dental therapist legislation

Support for Dental Therapist Model

- **NM Public Health Association (NMPHA)** endorsed HB 495, the dental therapist bill in the 2011 NM legislative session.
- **Union County Health & Wellness Network** (Clayton, NM) and the **Pueblo of Kewa/Santo Domingo Health Board** supported HB 495 and would like to be demonstration sites for dental therapists.
- **Native American Professional Parent Resources, Inc.** – *(Administers the Albuquerque Area Dental Support Center Dental Support Services which provides dental services to all Indian Health Service (IHS), Tribal, and Urban Dental Programs in New Mexico, Southern Colorado, and Texas)*
- **Albuquerque Area Indian Health Board (AAIHB)** supported HB 495.
- **AARP New Mexico** supported HB 495.
- **New Mexico Telehealth Alliance (NMTHA)**
- **New Mexico Health Resources (NMHR)**
- **New Mexico Center on Law & Poverty**
- **Native Health Initiative**
- **Des Moines School Health Advisory Council**
- General support for mid-level dental provider or dental therapist model:
 - **National Congress of American Indians (NCAI)**
 - **American Public Health Association (APHA, since 2005)**

NM Dental Crisis Demands Action

- We have reached out to and met with those who oppose our proposal, and we will continue to do so.
- However, the NM dental crisis is bigger than trade association interests.
- It demands action, an innovative and tested solution for all New Mexicans
- Solution: Legislation that allows for NM Dental Therapists, and a NM Dental Therapist program

Call to Action

- **To improve NM rural, tribal and underserved access to high-quality, cost-effective dental services,**
- **Provide economic opportunity for these communities,**
- **Restore community self-determination and tribal sovereignty, and**
- **To allow the best of NM's training institutions and communities to partner to solve our dental care crisis.**

Support and recommend legislation that includes dental therapists as part of New Mexico's dental team.



-Thank you -

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