

# Dental Therapists – A Solution for Our Community

KRISTEN CHRISTY  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
UNION COUNTY NETWORK,  
CLAYTON/UNION COUNTY, NM

NM Health & Human Services Committee  
Santa Fe, NM  
December 19, 2013

## Union County Network

- Executive Director, Union County Network
  - Convene community organizations, local government, and individuals to develop collective capacity and collaborative efforts that support individual and community well-being.
  
- Programming
  - Manage Des Moines School -Based Health Center
  - Physician (Workforce) Recruitment and Community Marketing Initiative
  - Farm to School
  - Evening Roundtables

## Our Community

- Clayton, NM – 2,000
- Including surrounding areas of NM, TX, OK, CO – approx. 4,000
- Agriculture and ranching, small business, local and county government, schools, rural hospital, correctional facility



## Our Community, Cont'd

- “Small town with a big heart.”
- Small-town community values, friendly, welcoming to residents and visitors.
- Independent-minded, self-reliant.



## Our Community's Dental Needs

- No dentist or hygienist for 12 years
- Nearest dentists – Dalhart, TX and Raton, NM
- Many drive to Springer, NM or Amarillo, TX (2 hrs)
  - Day off work or school to go to the dentist
  - Spend time and money in other communities, other states
  - Kids don't do as well in school, less productive employees
  - Hurts families and businesses
  - Many delay care; 2000 survey showed fewer than 1/2 Union County residents had an annual dental visit\*
  - Union County #1 in state – oral decay, needing care\*

\*2000 Oral Health Survey, NM Department of Health

## Our Efforts to Address Our Community's Dental Needs

- Des Moines School-Based Health and Wellness Center
  - HRSA grant for construction of a new SBHC center + dental.
- Have tried many times to recruit a dentist to Clayton
  - Not financially feasible for dentist to have a full-time office in Clayton - overhead costs too high for population size.
  - Network & EDC have worked with a few dentists to plan satellite clinics.
  - Occasional itinerate, short-term dentists.
  - No consistent source of dental care for our community.

## We Want a Long-Term Solution: Dental Therapist

- We've run the numbers. DT works for us.
  - Hub-and-spoke model
  - Right overhead-per-population
  - New rural doc able to capture 60% of outmigrating services.\*
  - Patients able to keep dental records local
- Good economic move for our community.
  - Job opportunity for DT, support staff, office supplies
  - Multiplier effect of secondary spending
  - Keeps local dollars local



## Clayton Has What it Takes to Invest in and Support a DT

- Committed to a long-term solution.
- Union County Network can facilitate nomination of DT students to go to NM DT education programs.
- Community already has invested in and have opportunity to invest further in dental equipment, office needs.
- Started planning for health careers pipeline in schools.

## Dental Therapists: A Good Fit for Our Community

- ✓ Supported by leaders and role models in community.
- ✓ Know our community.
- ✓ Have developed a strong capacity to solve our challenges together as a community.
- ✓ Passing DTH legislation would give us the opportunity to invest in and establish dental therapists as a long-term solution for our community.

- Thank you -

Kristen Christy  
Executive Director  
Union County Network  
[kchristy@ucnetwork.us](mailto:kchristy@ucnetwork.us)

