

Dental Therapists: Increasing Access to Dental Care

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Why Dental Therapy?

- Vast rural areas and Tribal reservations
 - 2.3 million Arizonans lack access to dental care
 - Rural areas face access challenges regardless of ability to pay
 - In 15 of Arizona's counties, all or some portion is designated a DHPSA
 - **People living in rural areas, tribal communities, low-income families, the uninsured, people with disabilities and the elderly encounter the greatest barriers to dental care**
- Lack of providers to serve Arizona's AHCCCS population
 - 32% of Arizona dentists accept AHCCCS
 - 25% of Arizona dentists bill AHCCCS at least \$10,000 per year
- Healthy workforce—Healthy economy
 - Growing, training & recruiting healthcare workers stimulates and stabilizes economic development

Why Dental Therapy?

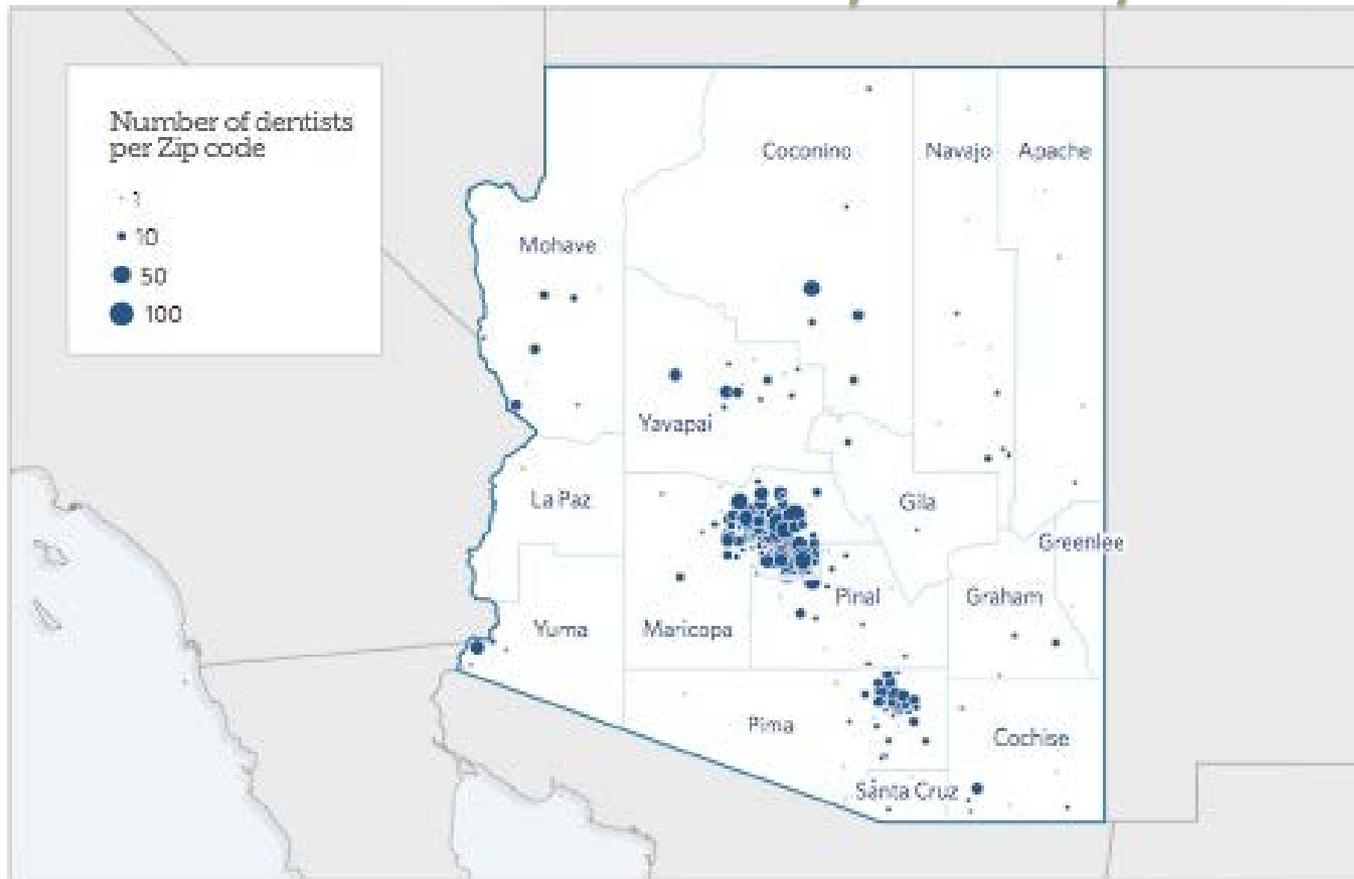
- In 2013 alone, over 44,000 Arizonans resorted to emergency rooms for preventable oral health conditions
- More than half of Arizona's kindergartners (52%) had tooth decay
- 86% of American Indian & 69% of Hispanic children have tooth decay
- Over 371,000 AZ children enrolled in AHCCCS received no dental care in 2015
- Cost can be a barrier for lower income families—even with private insurance

Barriers to accessing Care in Rural & Tribal Communities

- Geographic isolation
- Long distances between providers
- Limited services available close to home
- Long waits and complicated scheduling procedures



Dentists in Arizona by County



County	Number of dentists
Maricopa	2817
Pima	565
Yavapai	119
Coconino	109
Mohave	79
Pinal	61
Yuma	48
Cochise	44

County	Number of dentists
Navajo	38
Graham	17
Gila	14
Apache	11
Santa Cruz	9
La Paz	2
Greenlee	1

Goals of Dental Therapy Effort

- Bolster the supply of providers for underserved populations
 - Silent Epidemic of oral disease affecting racial/ethnic groups, low-income children, the disabled and the elderly
 - Tooth decay, periodontal disease & oral cancers:
 - Significantly higher for racial/ethnic minorities than whites
 - Utilization rates considerably lower for minorities compared to whites.
- Diversify dentistry to provide Culturally Competent Care
 - Latinos make up 18% of the US population, but just 9% of dentists
 - Racial/ethnic diversity in health professions is linked to improved access, greater patient satisfaction and better patient-provider communication

What is a Dental Therapist?

- Midlevel oral health provider, similar to nurse practitioners and physician assistants in medicine.
- Member of the dental health care team who works with a dentist to expand high-quality dental care to more patients, grow their practices, and provide treatment to underserved, at-risk populations.
- Provides preventive and routine restorative care within their scope of practice, such as filling cavities, placing temporary crowns, and extracting badly diseased or loose teeth.

What is a Dental Therapist?

- Dental Therapists (DT) engage in oral health prevention and promotional activities including:
 - Motivational interviewing
 - Oral health education
 - Oral screening
 - Caries risk assessment
 - Referrals
- DTs engage patients in community-based, alternative practice settings

Dental Therapy: Safety and Effectiveness

- More than **40,000 people** living in **81 previously unserved communities** in Alaska now have regular access to dental care.
- **Malpractice insurance** rates avg approximately \$99 per year.



Dental Therapy: Safety and Effectiveness

Results From Minnesota



- Decreased travel and wait times—**particularly in rural areas**
- **48% of dental therapists are working in rural areas**
- Clinics saw more new underserved and Medicaid patients—**80% of dental therapists' patients**
- Increased dental team productivity
- DTs working in a variety of treatment settings

Building Momentum for Dental Therapy

Dental therapy policies by state



Arizona's Sunrise Review Process

- Before any new legislation authorizing the practice of dental therapists can be *introduced* in January, a full Sunrise review process must take place. (A.R.S. §§ 32-3101 through 32-3106 and 32-4401 through 32-4403).
- Specifically for health related occupations, Arizona performs Sunrise reviews for scope of practice issues as well as the regulation of previously unregulated occupations (i.e. dental therapists).
- Each year applicant groups are required to submit a Sunrise application to the legislature by September 1st outlining public benefit and safety of new regulated scope.
- The applications are then referred to the relevant Committee of Reference (COR), which is a joint committee convened specifically for the Sunrise review. The COR holds a hearing and issues recommendations to the Legislature by December 1st.

Arizona's Sunrise Review Process

- The Sunrise process in Arizona is somewhat contentious and politicized, with occupational groups fiercely debating issues during the COR hearings.
- The Arizona Dental Association will be in strong opposition to the dental therapy Sunrise application.
- Actively building a coalition in support of dental therapy.
- There only needs to be a simple majority for a “favorable review” of a Sunrise application (Total of 10 COR members: 5 House members, 5 Senate members- all members on the Health committees).

Dental Therapy Sunrise Application

- On September 1, Dental Care for Arizona will submit another Sunrise request to establish new licensure and scope of practice for dental therapists (DT) in Arizona. We expect a hearing on this issue in December.
- Arizona's Dental Practice Act currently prevents mid-level dental providers from practicing in this state.
- The 2010 reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) prohibits tribes and IHS facilities from employing mid-level dental providers unless State law specifically authorizes their use.

Dental Therapy Sunrise Proposal

- **Broad Approach**

- The DT Sunrise application is drafted broadly so that we may work collaboratively and have input from coalition partners.
- Avoids too many restrictions on DTs so that it does not unintentionally create more barriers to access for the underserved, tribes and rural areas of the state.

Dental Therapy Sunrise Proposal

- **Statewide Initiative**

- Goes hand-in-hand with the broad approach.
- Proposal includes authorization of DTs to practice statewide so that they may begin addressing the significant need for dental care in *all* dental shortage areas of our state.
- Differs from the Alaska DHAT model (and WA & OR): DTs would be permitted to practice on both tribal lands and non-tribal lands.

Dental Therapy Sunrise Proposal

- **Aligns with CODA Standards**

- In August 2015, the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) voted to adopt and implement national training standards for dental therapy education, just as they have for dental, dental hygiene and dental assisting programs.
- CODA Accreditation reduces unnecessary educational burdens while ensuring the quality of practitioners.
- CODA requires three academic years of DT training that includes clinical and didactic training and testing and gives advanced standing to dental hygienists.
- Arizona currently has 10 CODA accredited schools across the state (2 dental schools and 8 dental hygiene schools).

Dental Therapy Sunrise Proposal

- **Indirect Supervision**

- The DT works under a collaborative practice agreement with a licensed, practicing license of a dentist through a collaborative management agreement.
- DTs are allowed to work under the **indirect supervision** of a dentist. The licensed dentist does not have to be present—allowing DTs to extend office hours & work in remote, non traditional settings.
- Proposal requires a DT to be licensed through the State Board of Dental Examiners.

Recommendations for Engagement

- What's been successful in other states?
 - Broad Coalitions of Support
 - Strong supporting data
 - Key spokespeople to carry the message
 - Strong PR & Media Campaign
 - Grassroots efforts
 - Personal stories bring it home

Coalition of Support

A broad coalition of interests and support of dental therapy legislation:

- Arizona Rural Health Association
- Inter-Tribal Association of Arizona
- Arizona Dental Hygienists Association
- AZ Section, American Congress of Ob/Gyns
- Valle del Sol (FQHC)
- Chicanos Por La Causa
- Arizona Farm Bureau
- Navajo Nation
- Goldwater Institute
- Working closely with CODA accredited education providers
- Various rural/public oral health providers and interests

We value your input!

Thank You!

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