

To: All Legislators

From: Representatives Felzkowski, Nygren, Kolste, Mursau, Neylon, Pronschinske, Skowronski, Snyder, Stafsholt, Tauchen, and Quinn
Senators Craig, Darling, Taylor, Kapenga, Tiffany, Kooyenga, Bernier, and Hansen

Re: Co-Sponsorship of LRB-1947/1: Licensure of Dental Therapy

DEADLINE: 12:00 PM on Tuesday, February 26th, 2019

Did you know that February is National Children's Dental Health Month? **Wisconsin currently ranks 45th of all states in the number of low-income children who saw a dentist in 2017.** Now more than ever, it is so important that we work toward increasing access to dental care for all. After working on dental therapy licensure for the last two years with introduction of a bill late last session, we are proud to bring this legislation forward again.



WHAT DOES THE BILL DO?

This bill seeks to increase access to care, especially for the 1.2 million Wisconsin residents currently living in areas with dentist shortages. The bill provides for the licensure of dental therapists who are members of the dental care team that would be able to engage in limited practices of dentistry, such as fillings and sealants.

The bill requires that these health care practitioners work under a dentist's general supervision.

As in other health care fields, dental therapists serve as a mid-level provider, like nurse practitioners and physician assistants. Providing dental practices the option to include these well-trained dental professionals in their dental teams will allow for increased access, lower practice costs, and savings for the state, all without compromising quality of care.

Dental therapists receive the same training as dentists for the procedures they are allowed to perform within their scope and must meet rigorous standards approved by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA)- the same entity overseeing the training of dentists nationwide. A systematic research review by the American Dental Association Council on Scientific Affairs found that dental care teams that employ mid-level providers such as dental therapists can reduce the rate of untreated tooth decay more than teams that employ only dentists.

WHAT PROBLEM WILL THE BILL SOLVE?

Access to Care

According to federal statistics, a staggering 64 of the 72 counties in Wisconsin face dentist shortages. Even more concerning, there are currently over 1 million Wisconsinites who depend on Medicaid for dental benefits that face additional barriers – only 37% of current dentists in the state accept Medicaid patients. Dentist availability plays a major role in why **Wisconsin rates 45th of all states** in the number of Medicaid children who saw a dentist in 2017.

Emergency Room Over-utilization

Research also shows dental therapists are needed to reduce the number of costly trips to emergency rooms for preventable dental conditions. In 2015, Wisconsin hospitals clocked more than 41,000 emergency room visits for which a preventable dental condition was the primary or secondary diagnosis (of these visits, 56% were paid for by Medicaid). If accounting for only primary

diagnosis visits (33,113) at an average cost of \$749 per visit (in 2012), this represents nearly \$25 million in potentially avoidable hospital charges.

HOW CAN DENTAL THERAPISTS SOLVE THIS PROBLEM?

Mid-level providers in other fields of medicine were once a new concept and are now a mainstay in today's health care system. In addition to over 50 countries, dental therapists are currently authorized in Arizona, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, and Vermont with tribal authorization in Alaska, Washington and Oregon. Several other states are currently considering legislation.

Dentists in other states who have embraced the concept and employed dental therapists report increased dental team productivity, increased profits, personnel cost savings, and improved patient satisfaction. A 2014 report released by Minnesota Board of Dentistry and Department of Health found clinics employing dental therapists could see more patients, over 80% on Medicaid. These patients experienced decreased travel time and nearly one-third saw decreased wait times. Increasing access and savings from the lower costs of employing dental therapists made it possible for clinics to expand capacity to see more Medicaid and underserved patients.

Dental therapists are also cost effective. Under the current system, dentists are often providing routine care rather than providing procedures at the top of their scope. This is a highly inefficient use of Medicaid dollars. With dental therapists as part of the team, dentists can delegate more routine procedures to their dental hygienists and dental therapists, freeing their time to do more complex and costly procedures. This would lower a practice's labor costs, allowing them to serve Medicaid patients more cost effectively, even with the low reimbursement rate dentists currently receive. Dentists in other states have even reported that their dental therapists can often perform procedures like fillings better than they do because of the frequency and repetition in which they perform them.

SUPPORT FOR DENTAL THERAPY

This concept is bipartisan and has been embraced by conservatives and liberals alike, a fact that was highlighted last year in an op-ed by Grover Norquist and Donald Berwick, CMS Administrator under President Obama, who wrote "allowing dental therapists to practice is a bipartisan solution that state legislators can adopt right now that benefits small businesses, helps patients, and eases the burden of rising health care costs, including Medicaid." In a national poll conducted in 2016 by Americans for Tax Reform, 79% of all voters were in favor the idea. That included support from 77% of Republicans, 79% of independents, and 80% of Democrats.

The dental access crisis in Wisconsin directly affects the health of children, those living in rural areas, the disabled, low-income residents, the elderly, and veterans. The indirect effects are felt by employers, school districts, taxpayers, and the health care system. **That is why so many stakeholders support this bill, including:**



Anthem
Badger Institute
Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin
Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
City of Milwaukee
Delta Dental of Wisconsin
Disability Rights Wisconsin
Disability Service Provider Network
Heartland Institute
Kids Forward
Milwaukee Latino Health Coalition
Oneida Nation of Wisconsin
Penfield Children's Center
Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action
Program, Inc.
The Arc Wisconsin
United Community Center

Waukesha County Community Dental Clinic
Wisconsin Assisted Living Association
Wisconsin Association of Free & Charitable Clinics
Wisconsin Association of Health Plans
Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments &
Boards
Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental
Disabilities
Wisconsin Community Action Program Association
Wisconsin Community Services, Inc.
Wisconsin Counties Association
Wisconsin Dental Hygienists' Association
Wisconsin Hospital Association
Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition
Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association
Wisconsin Public Health Association

If you would like to co-sponsor this legislation, please reply to this email or call Representative Felzkowski's office at 266-7694 or Senator Craig's office at 266-5400 **no later than 12:00 PM on Tuesday, February 26th, 2019.**

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill provides for the licensure of dental therapists, who are health care practitioners who may engage in the limited practice of dentistry.

Under current law, dentists and dental hygienists are licensed by the Dentistry Examining Board to practice dentistry and dental hygiene, respectively. This bill provides for the licensure of a third type of dental practitioner, dental therapists. Under the bill, the board must grant a dental therapist license to an individual who satisfies certain criteria, including completion of a dental therapy program and passage of required examinations.

Dental therapists may provide dental therapy services only under the general supervision of a dentist with whom the dental therapist has a collaborative management agreement that addresses various aspects of the dental therapist's practice. Supervision by a dentist requires the dentist's prior knowledge and consent, but does not require the presence of the dentist at the time a task or procedure is being performed or prior examination or diagnosis of a patient by a dentist prior to the provision of dental therapy services by a dental therapist. Dental therapists are, subject to the terms of a collaborative management agreement, limited to providing services, treatments, and procedures that are specified in the bill, as well as additional services, treatments, or procedures specified by the board by rule. Dental therapists must complete 12 hours of continuing education each biennium.

The bill subjects dental therapists to, or covers dental therapists under, various other laws, including the health care records law, the volunteer health care provider program, the health care worker protection law, and the emergency volunteer health care practitioner law. The bill also provides for loan forgiveness for dental therapists under the health care provider loan assistance program.

Finally, the bill requires, effective when the first individual becomes licensed as a dental therapist in this state, that two dental therapists be added to the board. For further information see the state fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.