



Bringing Dental Therapists to Kansas

The Dental Therapist model is ideal for Kansas and its economy. By utilizing dental therapists, we can grow businesses, ensure that Kansans have access to regular dental care and save money.

Why do we need dental therapists?

A gap in the dental work force leaves 83 percent of Kansas counties without enough dental providers, affecting rural and urban communities, businesses and families, regardless of where they live or if they are insured. Physician assistants and nurse practitioners have already helped address the medical workforce shortage, and dental therapists will do the same for the dental workforce.

What is a dental therapist?

Dental therapists will obtain advanced education and training and pass a comprehensive clinical exam. Dental therapists will always work under the supervision of a dentist. They will provide routine and preventive care — like cleanings, fillings and simple extractions. Dental therapists will work in dental offices and community settings, such as nursing homes and schools.

Other states and 52 other countries are addressing dental workforce shortages by utilizing mid-level dental providers. Every study conducted on providers like dental therapists shows they provide safe, quality care to patients.

Growing businesses

Dental therapists will allow dentists to grow their practices and treat more patients in an efficient and cost-effective manner. By employing just one dental therapist, a dental practice will be able to schedule 2,000 to 3,000 more appointments annually.

The dental therapist model will also benefit hygienists by giving them an opportunity to learn new skills and advance their careers. They will be trained right here in Kansas and work under supervising dentists. Allowing hygienists to expand their skill sets will benefit their careers, patients and the dental practices where they work.

Ensuring healthy Kansans

Hundreds of thousands of Kansans lack access to dental care. Untreated dental problems often lead to major medical problems, such as heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

Senior citizens, people with disabilities and children are particularly affected. For children, poor dental health leads to lifelong medical problems and can inhibit their ability to learn. Tooth decay is the No. 1 chronic childhood illness — five times more prevalent than asthma. By adding dental therapists to the dental workforce, more adults and children will have reliable access to routine, preventive oral health care.

Providing cost-effective care

The dental workforce shortage affects all Kansans, whether it's through higher costs for dental services, increased insurance premiums or the growing burden of uncompensated care on community hospitals and clinics.

Dental therapists will be able to provide high-quality, cost-effective routine and preventive care and will cost less to educate and employ than a dentist. This is especially beneficial for Kansas' safety-net clinics, which will be able to utilize state dollars more efficiently.

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

"Dentists in Kansas are small-business owners and should be allowed to expand their practices as they see fit. Government should remove the overwhelming regulations that restrict access to dental care."

—Americans for Prosperity,
Kansas Chapter

"These mid-level practitioners will make it easier and more affordable for underserved populations, including elderly, to obtain high-quality oral care, while at the same time freeing up dentists to do more complex procedures."

—AARP

"Mid-level dental providers would allow us to see more patients, to make better use of public dollars and create critically needed jobs."

—Jason Wesco, CEO of
Health Partnership Clinic in
Johnson County.