



# Support Dental Therapy to Improve Access to Care in Washington

Washingtonians – particularly families with low incomes and people of color – do not have enough oral health care providers where they live.

Dental therapists can help meet that demand and serve as primary dental care providers who deliver routine and preventive care under the supervision of a dentist.

## What are the barriers?

- More than 2 million Washington residents have a [dental care provider shortage](#) where they live.
- Less than half of Washington's children, and about one in four adults, [covered by Medicaid](#) see a dentist each year.
- Washington's [dentists accept Medicaid payments 44% less](#) than dentists in other states.
- The **cost of treatment** continues to be one of the largest barriers to care for all Washingtonians.

## Who is affected?

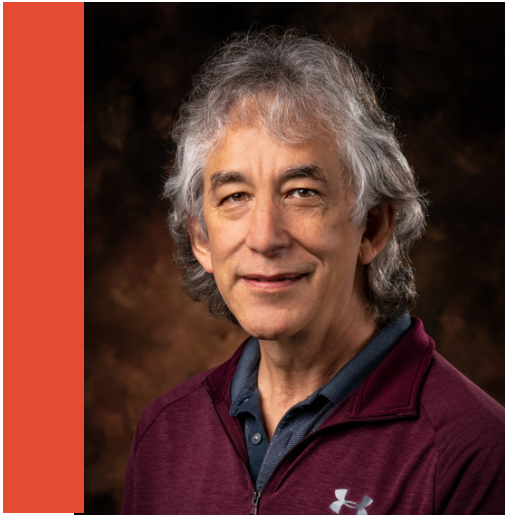
- **Low-income families and communities of color** suffer higher rates of dental disease because of inequities in our healthcare system.
- Washington's **children of color suffer higher rates of tooth decay** than their white peers.
- [Low-income adults](#) are more than twice as likely to **avoid smiling** due to the condition of their teeth.
- **Rural low-income communities** struggle to find accessible care, **often traveling over an hour** to find a clinic that accepts Medicaid and new patients.



## Our Solution? Expand Dental Therapy Access Statewide.

- ✓ Improves oral health care for kids and adults.
- ✓ Diversifies oral health workforce for better and more local care.
- ✓ Expands care to under-resourced areas.
- ✓ Provides cost savings to state, clinics, and patients.
- ✓ Increases professional wage jobs in rural and underserved communities.

# There is a range of support for dental therapy...



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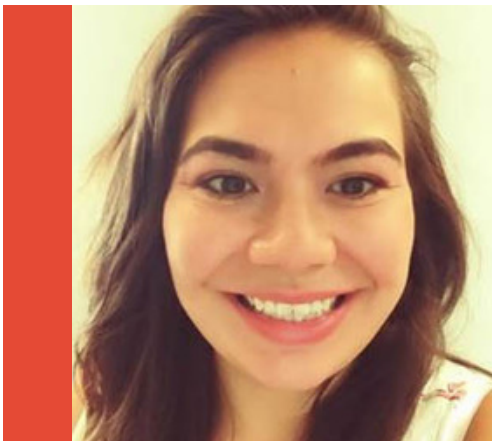
Dental therapists at Swinomish have broken the cycle of historically poor traumatic dental care in the community. Swinomish has improved access to oral health care through reduced appointment wait times from 2-3 months to now 1-2 weeks.

-Brian Wilbur, Senator,  
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

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We see it as a racial equity strategy. Because many of the areas in Washington State that don't have good dental care are populated by low-income people of color.

-Dr. Stephan Blanford, Executive Director, Children's Alliance for [State of Reform](#)



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We do increase the access to care, we do help expedite treatment plans getting completed. The key to that is that patients are cavity-free, they're pain-free, and now they have a little bit more trust because we have the opportunity to spend a little bit more time with our patients.

-Arielle Cawston, Dental Therapist,  
Lake Roosevelt Community Health Center

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Dental therapy also creates a career opportunity in health care for underserved communities. Our patients feel more comfortable when their dental providers understand their culture and speak their language.

-Dr. Narváez, Dental Director, Sea Mar Community Health Centers,  
for [The News Tribune](#)