

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO IMPROVING ORAL HEALTH

H.1916/S.1215: An Act to Improve Oral Health for All Massachusetts Residents

Bill Sponsors: Representatives Kate Hogan and William “Smitty” Pignatelli, Senator Harriette Chandler

The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) believes that a comprehensive approach is needed to address oral health care issues facing the Commonwealth.

BACKGROUND

According to the 2017 Massachusetts State Health Assessment:

“There are notable racial/ethnic disparities in oral health care utilization for children, adults, and pregnant women. Insurance status is often a barrier to accessing oral health care, along with lack of adequate transportation to attend an appointment. Improving access to oral health services and preventive measures, such as community water fluoridation, is important to preventing and treating oral diseases.”

The introduction of a new class of midlevel dental professionals is one strategy for increasing access to care in underserved areas. While multiple bills were filed in the 2017-2018 legislative session concerning midlevel providers, this consensus legislation was introduced in April 2018 following an agreement by leaders of the House of Representatives and Senate, as well as key advocates and stakeholders.

KEY PROVISIONS

This legislation is focused on providing care for underserved populations and reducing socioeconomic barriers to seeking dental care. This comprehensive approach to improving oral health would create a new class of midlevel providers called dental therapists, while enacting commonsense requirements to protect patient safety. The legislation also calls for oral health education for community health workers, education and assistance for local and regional boards of health related to community water fluoridation, and information for parents regarding children’s oral health screenings.

DENTAL THERAPISTS

Education

As a condition of licensure, dental therapists must:

- Obtain a bachelor’s and master’s degree
- Pass a comprehensive, competency-based clinical examination approved by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA)

Duties and Supervision

- Dental therapists must work under the direct supervision of a licensed dentist for the first two years or 2,500 hours of practice, whichever is longer. After that time, dental therapists are authorized to perform under general supervision:
 - All procedures and services within the scope of a public health dental hygienist
 - All procedures and services listed in the CODA dental therapy standards
- Advanced procedures—such as preparation and placement of direct restorations in primary and permanent teeth, preparation and placement of preformed crowns on primary teeth, and simple extractions of erupted primary teeth—must be performed under direct supervision. The supervising dentist can further limit the scope.
- To ensure proper supervision, a supervising dentist is limited to having a collaborative management agreement with no more than three dental therapists at the same time.

Practice Areas

If practicing outside of a federally qualified health center, dental therapists must maintain a caseload of at least 50 percent of patients who receive coverage through MassHealth or are considered underserved.

ADDITIONAL ORAL HEALTH COMPONENTS

Community Health Workers

As a condition for licensure or renewal of licensure, community health workers must receive education and or training in oral health.

Community Water Fluoridation

To increase awareness of the health benefits of fluoridated water in public drinking supplies, local and regional boards of health must be provided information, education, technical assistance, and seminars regarding water fluoridation as requested by municipalities and other local and regional governmental entities.

Children's Oral Health Screenings

All public schools shall notify parents or legal guardians concerning the importance of oral health screenings, including information on programs and services to access affordable dental care.

The Massachusetts Dental Society urges the legislature to pass ***An Act to Improve Oral Health for All Massachusetts Residents***, which creates a new class of midlevel dental professionals and includes important provisions to help ensure comprehensive oral health care for all Massachusetts residents.

Questions can be directed to:

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The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) represents more than 5,000 dentists in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (about 80 percent of dentists). A statewide constituent of the American Dental Association, the MDS is dedicated to the professional development of its members through initiatives in education, advocacy, the promotion of the highest professional standards, and championing oral health in the Commonwealth.