

# Native Oral Health in Florida

## A Call for Dental Therapists

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) have a strong need for dental care in Florida. Dental therapists can help meet the need.

### Native oral health needs

#### AI/AN children

Compared with White children in the United States, ages 3–5, AI/AN children have four times as many cases of untreated tooth decay.<sup>1</sup>

#### AI/AN adults

More than twice as many AI/AN adult dental patients suffer from untreated tooth decay than the general U.S. population and compared to any other racial or ethnic group.<sup>2</sup>

### Florida's dental care shortage

**A need for providers:** Florida has 240 dental health professional shortage areas and meets less than 15% of the need for Florida's population.<sup>3</sup>

**A need for cultural representation:** Fewer than 1% of dentists and dental hygienists in Florida are Native.<sup>4</sup>

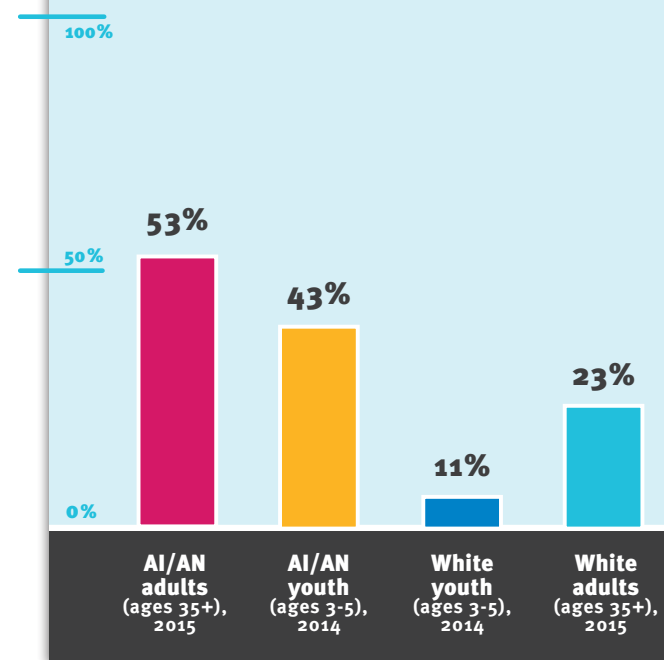
### Limited insurance options

Dental care can be difficult to afford for patients who lack insurance. Florida also has a shortage of providers who accept Medicaid. About 147,537 American Indians and Alaska Natives live in Florida, of which **nearly half** are either uninsured (18%) or enrolled in Medicaid (24%).<sup>5</sup>

**AI/AN youth:** In 2015, fewer than half (37.4%) of children in Florida with Medicaid received any kind of oral health care.<sup>6</sup>

**AI/AN adults:** In 2016, only a quarter (26%) of Florida dentists were Medicaid providers or had accepted Medicaid patients in the previous 12 months.<sup>7</sup>

Comparison of AI/AN and White youth and adults with untreated tooth decay (2014 and 2015)<sup>9</sup>



## Dental therapists – A successful, Native-led solution

Dental therapists provide safe and high-quality care within a limited scope of dental services.

Their services free the dentist to do more advanced procedures for their patients, extending the reach of the dentist-led team. They increase access to oral health in places where it's hard to hire dentists. They are also members of the tribal and urban communities where they work.

Both federally recognized tribes in Florida—the Seminole Tribe of Florida and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida—operate dental clinics that could benefit from the addition of dental therapists, which would also provide quality jobs to Florida tribal citizens.

### Status on state's authority: Limits and opportunities

Senate Bill 684 (House Bill 649) was introduced to the state legislature in February 2019. Through this bill, tribes would experience no limitations for using dental therapists, and the position would be eligible for Medicaid reimbursement.<sup>8</sup>

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**Native dental therapists offer cultural competence, which leads to better care for American Indians and Alaska Natives.**

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### Learn more

W.K. Kellogg Foundation dental therapy resource library: <http://dentaltherapyresourceguide.wkkf.org/>

W.K. Kellogg Foundation's video, "Alaska's Dental Therapists Are Bringing Back Smiles": <https://youtu.be/j8IRSp-1PpE>

Floridians for Dental Access: [floridiansfordentalaccess.com/](http://floridiansfordentalaccess.com/)

National Indian Health Board Tribal Oral Health Initiative: <https://www.nihb.org/oralhealthinitiative/index.php>

National Partnership for Dental Therapy: <https://www.dentaltherapy.org/>

Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board Native Dental Therapy Initiative: <http://www.npaihb.org/ndti/>

James Madison Institute brief, *Dental Therapists: Sinking Our Teeth into Innovative Workforce Reform*: <https://www.jamesmadison.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PolicyBrief-DentalTherapy-v07-web.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> Phipps, K.R. & Ricks, T.L. (2015, Apr.). The Oral Health of American Indian and Alaska Native Children Aged 1-5 Years: Results of the 2014 IHS Oral Health Survey. *Indian Health Service Data Brief*. [https://www.ihs.gov/doh/documents/IHS\\_Data\\_Brief\\_1-5\\_Year-Old.pdf](https://www.ihs.gov/doh/documents/IHS_Data_Brief_1-5_Year-Old.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Phipps, K.R. & Ricks, T.L. (2016, Mar). The Oral Health of American Indian and Alaska Native Adult Dental Patients: Results of the 2015 IHS Oral Health Survey. *Indian Health Service Data Brief*. [https://www.ihs.gov/DOH/documents/IHS\\_Data\\_Brief\\_March\\_2016\\_Oral\\_Health%20Survey\\_35\\_plus.pdf](https://www.ihs.gov/DOH/documents/IHS_Data_Brief_March_2016_Oral_Health%20Survey_35_plus.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation. Dental Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), as of December 31, 2018. <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/dental-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22collId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

<sup>4</sup> Florida Department of Health Public Health Dental Program. (2016). Florida's Burden of Oral Disease Surveillance Report, Version 1.1. <https://www.astdd.org/www/docs/fl-burden-of-disease-document-08-17-16.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> National Indian Health Board. (2018). Florida Medicaid Coverage for American Indians and Alaska Natives: The Impact of the Affordable Care Act 2012–2016. <https://www.nihb.org/tribalhealthreform/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/NIHB-AIAN-2012-2016-Florida-Medicaid.docx>

<sup>6</sup> See Endnote 4

<sup>7</sup> Florida Department of Health. (2017). *2015-2016 Workforce Survey of Dentists*. [http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/community-health/dental-health/reports/\\_documents/florida-workforce-survey-dentists-2015-2016.pdf](http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/community-health/dental-health/reports/_documents/florida-workforce-survey-dentists-2015-2016.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See Endnote 7

<sup>9</sup> See Endnote 2