

DENTAL THERAPY TOOLKIT

A Resource Prepared for Advocates and Partners



Fall 2020

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DENTAL THERAPY

Expanding Access to Oral Health Care

What is a Dental Therapist?

- Dental therapists are highly trained dental care professionals equipped to perform routine and preventive services.
- Dental therapists work as part of the dental care team, similar to the role of a physician assistant in medicine.

How do Dental Therapists Fit into the Dental Care Team?

- Dental therapists work under the supervision of a dentist and the care they provide complements dental hygienists and dental assistants, including oral health education and common dental procedures such as performing exams and filling cavities.
- Dental therapists bring new capacity and flexibility to the dental care team. By focusing on preventive and routine services, they free up dentists to provide more complex care and services to their patients.

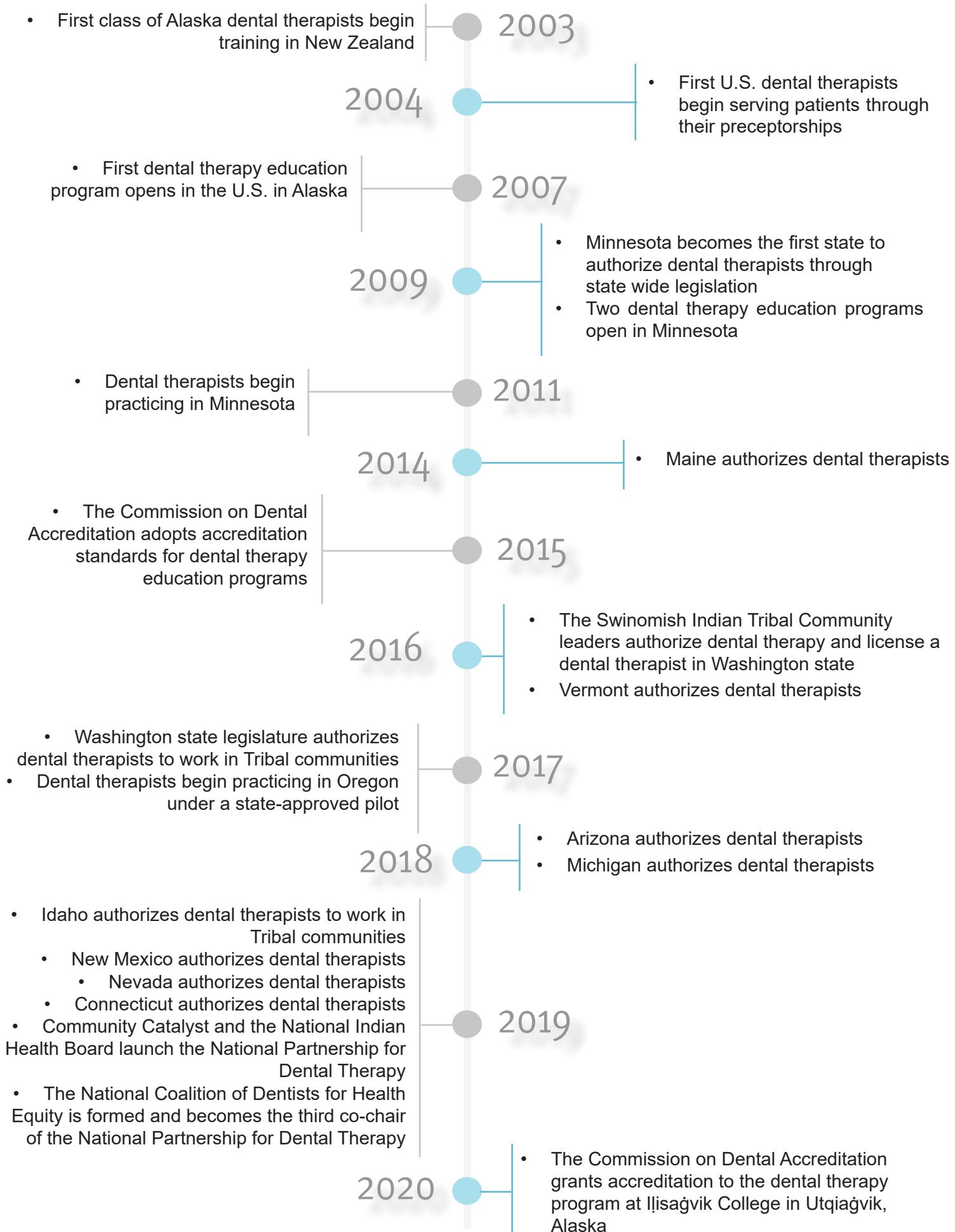
Dental Therapists Make a Difference

- Dental therapists fill a local gap by making dental care more accessible for underserved populations. More than 58 million Americans are unable to receive dental care in the communities in which they live.
- Dental therapists increase access to care by working in underserved community settings such as schools, senior centers and rural community clinics under the off-site supervision of a dentist.
- Dental therapy leads to job creation and business growth. Dental therapists are highly trained professionals who earn competitive annual salaries, and hiring them is a cost-effective way to expand the reach of the dental care team.

Dental Therapy Achieves Results

- Dental therapists have been successfully working in the United States as part of the dental care team for over 15 years.
- Dental therapy is currently authorized in 12 states with statewide legislation being considered in 8 additional states and more than 20 states actively exploring the profession.
- Dental therapists provide routine preventive and restorative care in more than 50 countries worldwide.

TIMELINE OF DENTAL THERAPY IN THE U.S.



DENTAL THERAPY MOMENTUM

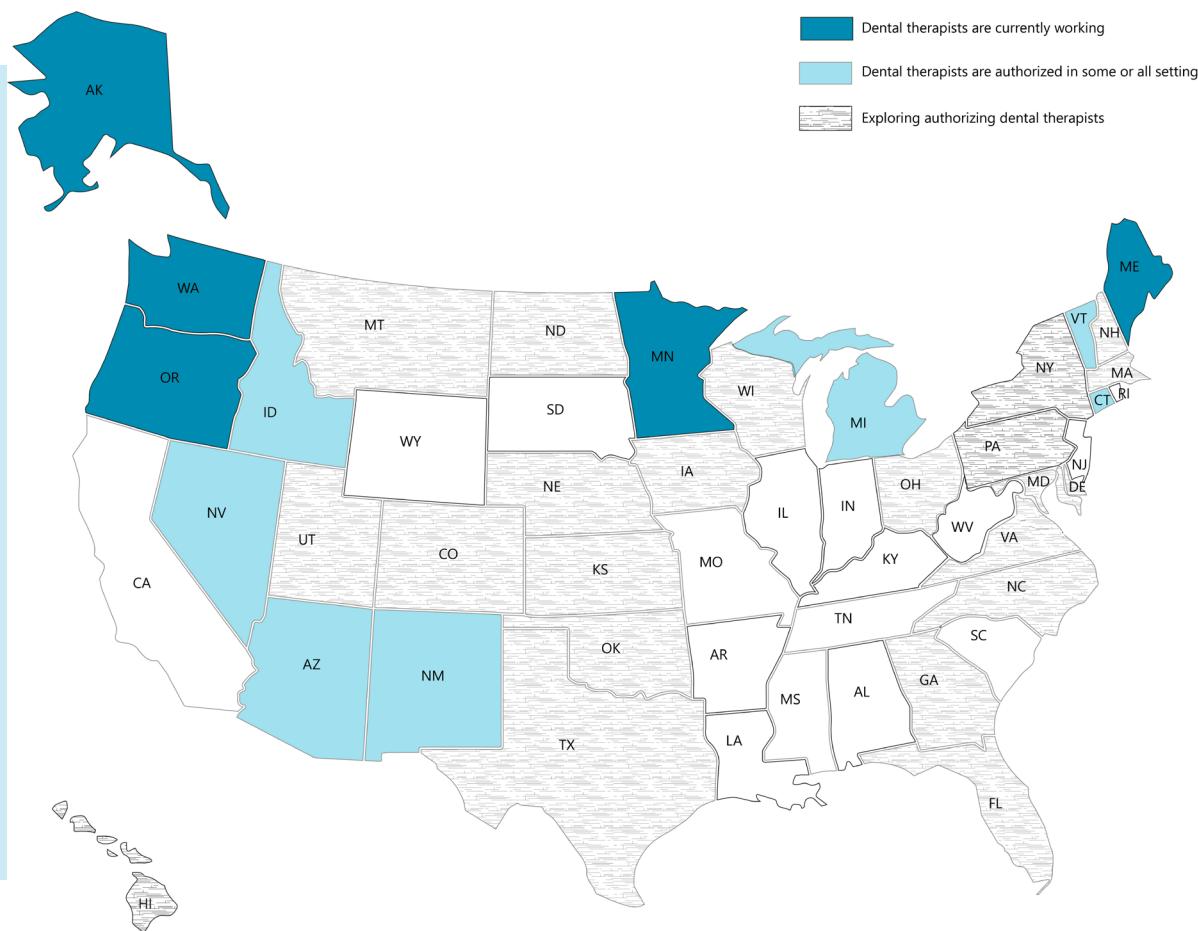
*There is increasing momentum for dental therapists across the country with
OVERWHELMING SUPPORT FROM ALL SECTORS*

- dentists, service organizations, businesses, dental hygienists, nonprofits, labor unions, local governments, Tribal leaders and educational entities, among others.

Dental therapists are currently working or authorized in 12 states with statewide legislation being considered or actively explored in a growing number of states across the country.

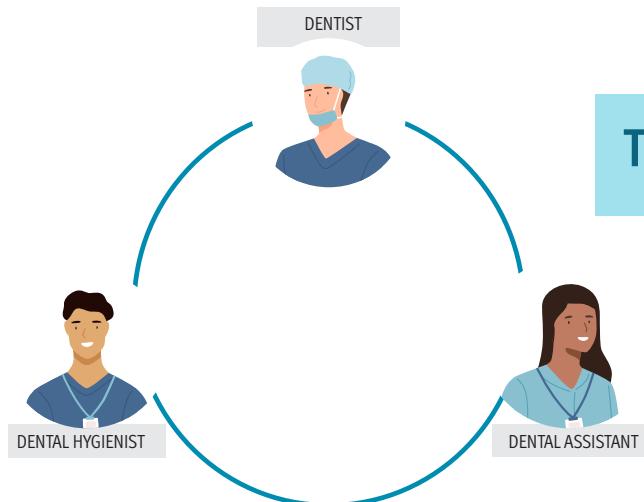
In 2015, the [Commission on Dental Accreditation \(CODA\)](#) officially recognized dental therapy as a profession and adopted national education standards for dental therapists. During the public comment period, more than 200 partners (including many community organizations, Tribal organizations, dentists, community colleges, dental hygienists and former government leaders) signed on to or submitted comments to ensure the CODA standards reflected the evidence.

In 2020, [Iliágvik College's Alaska Dental Therapy Educational Program \(ADTEP\)](#) became the first dental therapy educational program to receive full accreditation from CODA.

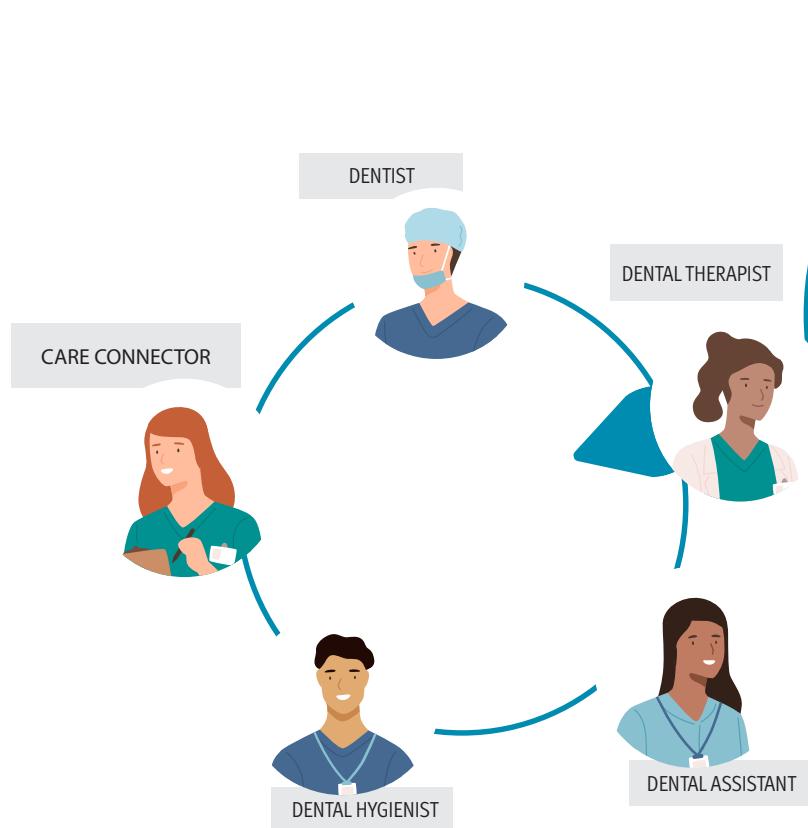


DENTAL THERAPY

Expanding the Dental Care Team



TRADITIONAL DENTAL CARE TEAM



EXPANDED DENTAL CARE TEAM

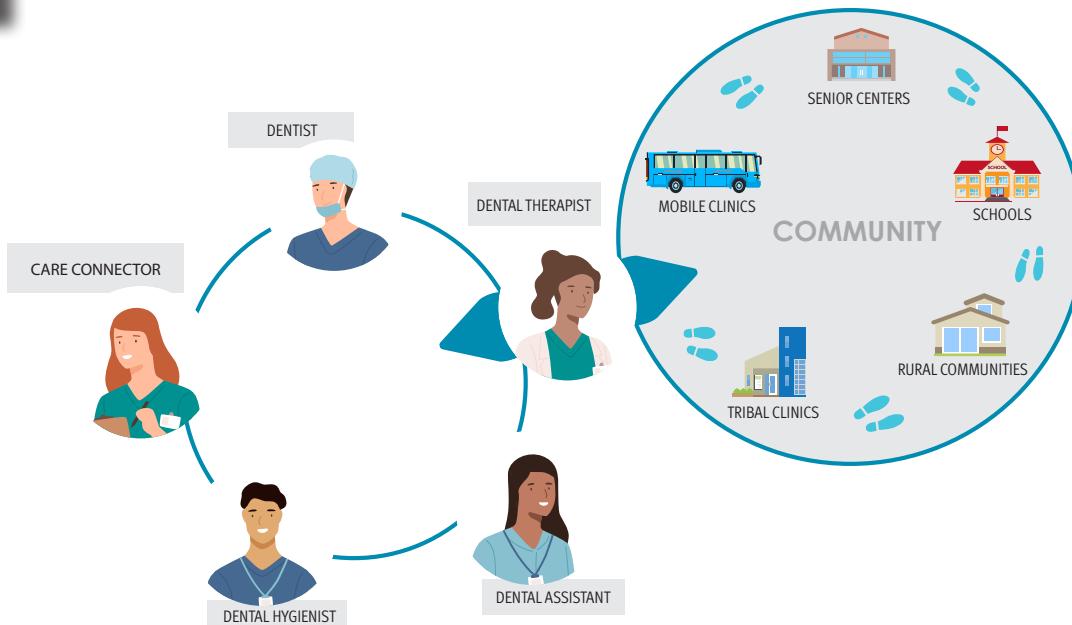
DENTAL THERAPY MATTERS

Increases Access. Expands the Team. Promotes Economic Development.



DENTAL THERAPIST

Highly trained dental care professional equipped to perform routine and preventive services working as part of the dental care team, similar to the role of a physician assistant in medicine.



INCREASES ACCESS TO CARE

More than 58 million Americans are unable to receive dental care in the communities in which they live, a reality that has been exacerbated by the onset of the global pandemic. In addition to private practice, dental therapists are able to increase access to care by providing local care through schools, senior centers, mobile clinics, rural community clinics and Tribal clinics, among others, under the off-site supervision of a dentist. Dental therapists have made it possible to decrease travel and wait times for patients.



EXPANDS THE DENTAL CARE TEAM

Dental therapists expand the dental care team. Working under the supervision of a dentist, the care dental therapists provide complements dental hygienists and dental assistants, including oral health education and common dental procedures such as filling cavities and extracting already loose teeth. Dental therapists bring new capacity and flexibility to the dental care team. By focusing on preventive and routine services, they free up dentists to provide more complex care and services to their patients.



PROMOTES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH JOB CREATION AND BUSINESS GROWTH

Hiring dental therapists is a cost-effective way for dentists to grow their practices. With a dental therapist on the team, dentists are able to perform more advanced procedures, serve more patients and earn additional revenue. Dental therapy leads to job creation and business growth. The role of a dental therapist provides an opportunity for a local high school graduate to attain a specialized degree and a good paying job, while also allowing them to live and work in their own community.

DENTAL THERAPISTS ARE COST-EFFECTIVE PROVIDERS THAT WORK

Dental therapists are both economically viable as well as job creators and revenue generators for their practices and their communities.

ALASKA DENTAL THERAPY FINDINGS



The Dental Therapist program generates **76 full-time jobs** per year with a net economic effect of \$9.7 M.



Aggregate patient savings amount to **\$40,000.00** per year per dental therapist.



Dental therapists bring in **\$150,000.00 to \$250,000.00** more than they cost to employ them and their dental assistant.

Source: Dental Utilization for Communities Served by Dental Therapists in Alaska's Yukon Kuskokwim Delta: Findings from an Observational Quantitative Study, August 11, 2017

Studies have repeatedly shown that dental therapists **increase access** and are **cost-effective providers**. Data also shows high levels of patient satisfaction metrics from those treated by dental therapists.

Dental therapists are currently practicing in four states – Alaska, Minnesota, Oregon and Washington – and authorized in eight additional states with a number of other states exploring dental therapy.

More than **50 countries** allow dental therapists to provide routine preventive and restorative care.



DENTAL THERAPIST SPOTLIGHT

BRIEANNE BORNTRAGER

Passion for Reaching the Underserved Leads to Increased Access to Oral Health Care, Job Creation and Cost-Effective Care for a Rural Community

Brieanne Borntrager knew from an early age that she wanted to pursue a career in oral health. At the University of Wisconsin, she was on a pre-dental track when she received an invitation to apply for the first class of a new dental therapy program at the University of Minnesota.

As an undergrad, Brie completed three impactful dental mission trips to Central America, working alongside pre-dental, pre-med and pre-vet students and providing much needed dental care for Tribal populations in the region. With her developing passion for treating underserved populations top of mind, Brie applied to both the dental school and dental therapy programs.

In 2009, Brie was waitlisted for dental school at the same time she was accepted into the first dental therapy class in the state. She knew she had a difficult decision to make, but ultimately, dental therapy best fit Brie's desire to work with the underserved – a passion that she believes would have been challenging to pursue with the significant expense of dental school and the subsequent loans that would have been necessary. Brie was also attracted to the flexibility dental therapy provided as she celebrated the birth of her first child while completing her dental therapy degree.

Dental therapy was the right decision for Brie and for her community.

Early in her career as a dental therapist, Brie served as part of two Federally Qualified Health Centers and as part of a large group practice comprised of patients mostly on state insurance.



Today, Brie is an integral part of Forever Smiles – Arlington, a satellite clinic of Forever Smiles – Glencoe, in a small farming community located an hour west of Minneapolis. Dr. Shawn Knorr had a desire to meet the needs of underserved patients for the rural community while also continuing to perform more complex dentistry work such as implants, full mouth rehabilitation, etc. To fulfill both missions, he expanded the dental team by bringing Brie on as a dental therapist and purchased the satellite clinic practice from a retiring dentist.

Production of Practice '17 – '18 (under previous provider model):

\$288,000; collections: \$250,000

Production of Practice '18 – '19 (with dental therapist model):

\$1,365,000; collections: \$834,000



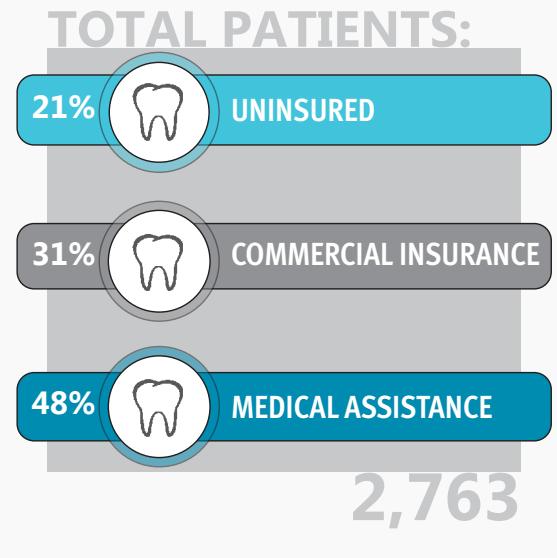
Initially, Brie was the only main full-time provider at the satellite clinic, and the clinic operated three chairs with a full-time dental hygienist, full-time dental assistant and two full-time front desk staff. The owner dentist and/or an associate dentist served on a rotating schedule to provide off-site supervision and to perform any procedures outside of the dental therapy scope.

Open four days a week, the satellite clinic immediately began serving additional patients who had previously struggled to receive access to care. **Working in collaboration with the dentist, Brie has been able to meet the needs of the community and provide much needed pediatric and restorative care to the rural farming community in which she serves.**

In addition to providing increased access to care, financially the model has been economically advantageous for the practice as well. From 2018 – 2019, the overhead was approximately \$42,000/month with profits of \$27,000/month.

In just two years, due to demand and effectiveness, Brie and her colleagues were able to expand from three chairs to five chairs and effectively double their team and capacity by adding another full-time dentist as well as an additional full-time dental hygienist and support staff.

The dental therapy model has been critical to the success of their clinic. The model worked initially because Brie was able to work under general supervision. As a result, in working together, the team was able to grow the patient base until there were enough financial resources generated to bring on additional staff.



PRODUCTION OF PRACTICE

March 2018 - March 2019



Even further, Forever Smiles – Arlington is the only practice accepting state insurance in the two counties in which they are located.

Dental therapy has brought job creation, increased access and cost-effective care to the rural community in which the clinic is located and, Brie's passion for meeting the needs of the underserved is realized day in and day out.



DENTAL THERAPIST SPOTLIGHT

ARIELLE CAWSTON

Breaking Down Barriers and Changing the Mindset about Dental Care for Future Generations Increases Overall Health

Arielle Cawston was a dental assistant who wanted to do more and provide a trusting environment for oral health care, so she pursued a career in dental therapy. Today, she is proud to be one of the first female dental therapists practicing in Washington, which she achieved by completing both the Iḷisaġvik College program as well as a 400+ hour preceptorship with her current supervising dentist.



Arielle knows firsthand the trauma that can be associated with going to the dentist. She's studied how history affects people as part of her coursework at Washington State University, but she also recalls events from her own youth – *"I must have been about 5 years old, when I was sitting in a dental chair crying that my tooth hurt after receiving a shot, the dental assistant came up to me, slapped my hand and told me to stop because it didn't hurt. I never wanted to go back to the dentist, and I didn't, until I was about 15, when I broke a tooth and needed to have one of my permanent adult teeth extracted."*

Arielle doesn't want other children to have to endure what she experienced.

As a dental therapist, Arielle is motivated to change people's mindset about dental care, but she recognizes that sentiments are rooted deep and are often passed down through families. She understands that when parents show fear, children will mimic their behavior.

With dental therapy, there's an opportunity to change the outlook for future generations. Arielle looks at the body as a whole and talks to her patients about dentistry and how it affects their overall health. She says, *"Patients are people, not just mouths."*

Arielle grew up in the community she is currently serving, consistently watching healthcare providers come and go. **She chose to pursue dental therapy because she recognized that her people, her family and her children deserved better.** Even further, Arielle was attracted to the culturally competent element of dental therapy and the potential for a provider that deeply understands the community in which he or she serves.

Her main objective for the Colville Reservation is to focus on preventive care for patients in order to avoid problems before they start.

Going forward, Arielle knows that local youth will see her career path and the meaningful contribution dental therapy has made to the practice itself. She also hopes that they'll see that health care professionals can and do come from their own communities and that, with hard work and dedication, they too can achieve their goals.



DENTAL THERAPIST SPOTLIGHT

JASON MECUM

Earning Trust and Making an Impact through Community Outreach with a New Dental Therapist

Jason Mecum always knew he wanted to pursue a career in the health care field so when dental therapy was introduced to him by his tribe, he was all in.

Since graduating, Jason has been working as the first dental therapist in a clinic for the Lower Elwha S'klallam Tribe while he waits for the new Coos Bay clinic to be completed.



Because Jason is from a different community, it was tough at first, but he started conducting some outreach, a hallmark of dental therapy, and through those activities he's earned the trust of the community. Jason volunteers with Meals on Wheels, distributes toothbrushes and educational handouts, sets up booths and attends events.

Absent a dental therapist on staff, there wouldn't be someone with the capacity and training to go out into the community and provide this type of outreach.

Jason has also been able to connect with high risk individuals in the community through treatment programs along with providing basic oral health instruction for them. Because dental pain can trigger relapses, preventive care is paramount to overall health. And the outreach has made a significant impact - Jason and his team have seen quite a few new patients as a result.

The staff, including his supervising dentist, have been incredibly supportive. They've functioned well as a team and since Jason is able to perform more basic procedures, the dentists can focus on meeting more complex needs.

With a dental therapist as part of the care team, the clinic is able to see more patients each day. Both of the dental hygienists in the office were able to increase hygiene recalls, and the patient load has increased while also achieving shorter wait times.

Seeing patients leave with a smile on their face is the most fulfilling part of being a dental therapist for Jason. In some cases, their whole outlook has changed – they're happier and more confident.

Jason's experience proves that a dental therapist is an important, impactful and relatable part of the dental care team. Providing personal outreach and building trust dental therapy makes a difference.



DENTAL THERAPIST SPOTLIGHT

SARAH CHAGNON

*Community Connection, Flexibility Key to Making a Difference through Dental Therapy;
Offers New Ways to Provide Care during COVID-19 Pandemic*

Sarah Chagnon, a Swinomish Tribal member in Washington, was in for a routine dental cleaning when her dentist pulled her aside and encouraged her to look into dental therapy. At the time, she was just finishing up her prerequisites for a nursing program at a local community college, but her interest was piqued, and she decided to explore dental therapy further. Sarah was able to shadow Daniel Kennedy, one of the first dental therapists in the United States, and after observing him, she knew that she was meant to pursue dental therapy.

Sponsored by the Swinomish Tribe, Sarah packed up her family and moved to Alaska to complete her dental therapy education – a decision she calls one of the best she's ever made. During her schooling she lived in Anchorage and the small rural Alaskan village called Bethel. There she worked at the Bethel Yuut Dental Clinic as well as the Yukon Kuskokwin Hospital. She then returned home, and currently practices at the Swinomish Dental Clinic.

Pursuing a career in dentistry was a calling for Sarah. She personally understands the incredible need for high-quality, accessible, culturally competent care having grown up with a great deal of fear and trauma associated with dentistry as a child.

Connection is key. Sarah believes in letting her patients know that they're not alone, that she's been there too. Above all, she wants her patients to feel safe with her. Sarah is fully committed to providing the best care she can to patients while also providing holistic dental support to her community. She hopes to improve conditions for those struggling with their teeth and help them be proud of their smile. Sarah loves working with children and hopes that having a dental therapist in the community will increase access to dental care, help families overcome dental fears and reduce the number of kids referred out for services.

With dental therapists, the Swinomish Dental Clinic has expanded its chairs and employees. Currently, they have 17 chairs and the staff is up to 18 people. Most importantly, the clinic has had a great response to its dental therapists from the community. Before dental therapists were on staff, dentists only had the capacity to schedule one root canal per week. Now they're able to schedule two or three a day when needed. Dental therapists have been able to free up dentists to focus on more complicated procedures that require more time.



When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Sarah and her colleagues weren't sure what the future of the clinic would look like, so she began creating innovative tools to stay connected and continue educating her patients. Through videos, Sarah provided useful information on how and why we brush our teeth and how disclosing tablets work, among others. She also delivered toothbrushes and toothpaste to the homes of preschoolers whom they previously visited in person weekly. Sarah believes now, more than ever, people need access to cost-effective dental care, and dental therapists are part of the solution.

For Sarah, becoming a dental therapist is not only a career but a meaningful way to connect with the community and to help people. It's who she is.



DENTAL THERAPIST SPOTLIGHT

AVENA FINKBONNER

Increasing Access through Innovation; School Visits and Teledentistry Reach More Patients

Avena Finkbonner grew up visiting the clinic where her mother worked her way up from a physician assistant to the clinic's director. Ultimately, her mother's story became a huge part of her story. When she was 16, Avena started working as a switchboard operator and later served in medical records, scheduling, referrals and contract health services.

Avena, like most people, was hoping to find a job she enjoyed. While taking classes at Charter College, she learned about a dental assistant program and knew it was the direction she wanted to go, which ultimately led to becoming a dental therapist.

As a dental provider, Avena believes it's important to serve the people you work for, but she's quick to point out the difference with dental therapists that naturally have an added passion for their own communities. Avena and her colleague and fellow dental therapist, Angela Johnson, have a deep connection to their community. Together, they've been able to reach into areas of the community in which the practice wasn't able to access before such as working with schools on prevention and awareness.

Dental therapists expand the capacity of the care team allowing dentists more flexibility to perform the more challenging restorations and higher-level procedures. This has been especially true and important during the COVID-19 pandemic as dentists are free to perform surgeries, root canals, implants, etc.

Teledentistry has also played an important role in how the community has received care. During the pandemic, dental therapists set up teleprevention appointments in order to continue to offer care to youth with braces who typically come in for cleanings every three months. Dental therapists deliver materials to the patients' homes for the appointments such as iPads, toothpaste, floss, fluoride varnish, iodine, etc. and then conduct appointments ranging from 30 minutes to an hour.



Having dental therapists on staff has allowed the clinic to expand the services the team provides and increase access to care, both of which are much needed for the Lummi community in which they live and serve.



DENTAL THERAPIST SPOTLIGHT

ANGELA JOHNSON

Expanding the Dental Care Team by Meeting Patients in the Community

Angela Johnson always wanted her profession to be community centered. After being introduced to dental therapy by a friend, she found that she had a real connection to the provider and the idea that dental therapy is focused on developing trust and rapport, being involved in the community and focusing on new techniques involving minimally invasive dentistry.

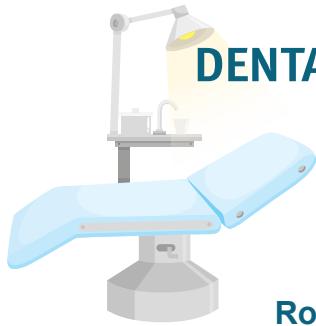
Through her dental therapy education, Angela says she learned a great deal about herself as a person, became stronger and made lasting friendships.

As a dental therapist at the Lummi Dental Clinic, there's a lot she enjoys, but what she loves most is hearing her patients' stories. Angela also says that being able to perform some of the procedures that alleviate pain for her patients is incredibly rewarding.

Angela often takes her work as a dental therapist out into the community – traveling to schools weekly to perform exams and administer sealants and fillings and attending other programs and events throughout the week.

Beyond patient care itself, it's incredibly rewarding for Angela when she hears that youth in the community are aspiring to a career path in dentistry because of her example.





DENTAL THERAPIST SPOTLIGHT

ROCHELLE FERRY

Early Trauma Leads to a Desire to Expand Care Capacity, Help Others through Relationship-Based Care

Rochelle Ferry understands the trauma associated with dental pain all too well. As a 16-year-old, she lost her front tooth playing red rover at a church function, an experience she describes as “horrific.” Previously, she was proud of her teeth, but after losing her front tooth, suddenly she couldn’t bring herself to smile and lost confidence.

Eventually, Roz was able to get a flipper and through that experience, realized that a lot of the girls her age who didn’t smile were embarrassed by their teeth due to cavities, crooked teeth and other ailments, a common feeling in rural Alaska.

It was then that Roz decided to pursue a career in dentistry. She became a dental assistant in high school and graduated from college as a certified dental assistant. Roz felt like if she could help others with their smiles, it might help to heal her.

But Roz discovered that she had a desire to do even more.

That’s when she learned about a small village in Norton Sound where a local provider, Dr. Mark Kelso, was one of the first dentists to embrace dental therapy. An opportunity arose, and a month later she left for two years of very intensive training in New Zealand. Following graduation, she moved back to Alaska.



Roz found fulfillment practicing dental therapy in rural Alaska traveling weekly to meet the needs of underserved communities in the area.

Later, because of family obligations, she needed a position that required less travel. Today, she is working for the Port Gamble S’Klallam tribe and practicing in a small clinic with a local dentist, two dental assistants and one hygienist.

For the team, the dental therapist is responsible for all of the community outreach – spending time at the elder center, playing with children in schools and meeting people in their homes. **Roz believes that when you connect with people outside the clinic environment, you can build a whole different relationship.** When they’re able to recognize you before coming into the clinic, it removes the fear often associated with the in-office experience.

The dentist’s time is spent performing higher level procedures while Roz is able to take on the majority of routine exams and fillings.

According to Roz, the most rewarding part of being a dental therapist is, in its simplest form, being able to help people, meet people where they are and personalize a treatment plan.

Roz has been a dental therapist for over 10 years and is grateful for what it has meant for her family’s financial security as well as for her personal and professional fulfillment.

SOCIAL MEDIA TOOL KIT

General:

Check out the timeline of dental therapy in the U.S. here & see the tremendous progress of the movement thus far #GoDentalTherapy

[[link to Timeline of Dental Therapy in the U.S.](#)]

There's increasing momentum for dental therapists across the U.S. w/ support from all sectors – check out the map to see where they're working, authorized & being explored #GoDentalTherapy

[[link to Dental Therapy Momentum](#)]

Dental therapists expand the dental care team bringing new capacity & flexibility #GoDentalTherapy

[[link to Dental Therapy: Expanding the Dental Care Team](#)]

Dental therapists are both economically viable as well as job creators & revenue generators for their practices & communities #GoDentalTherapy

[[link to Dental Therapists are Cost-Effective Providers that Work](#)]

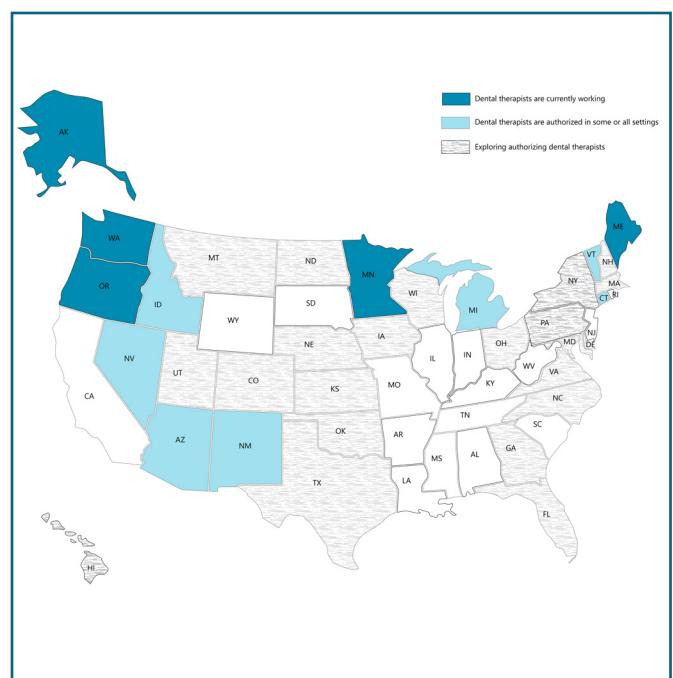
Want to learn more about why dental therapy matters? Check out this dynamic toolkit for graphics, one pagers, dental therapist spotlights & more #GoDentalTherapy #dentaltherapistspotlight

[[link to Dental Therapy Toolkit](#)]

Dental therapists increase access, expand the team & promote economic development. Check out the link to learn more about this cost-effective provider needed now more than ever #GoDentalTherapy

[[link to Dental Therapy Toolkit](#)]

Share Squares:



Dental Therapist Spotlight:

Dental therapist's passion for reaching the underserved leads to increased access to oral health care, job creation & cost-effective care for rural community #GoDentalTherapy #dentaltherapistspotlight

[\[link to Dental Therapist Spotlight: Brieanne Borngrager\]](#)

Dental therapist breaks down barriers & changes the mindset about dental care for future generations increasing overall health #GoDentalTherapy #dentaltherapistspotlight

[\[link to Dental Therapist Spotlight: Arielle Cawston\]](#)

Dental therapist earns trust & makes an impact through community outreach as a new member of the community #GoDentalTherapy #dentaltherapistspotlight

[\[link to Dental Therapist Spotlight: Jason Mecum\]](#)

Dental therapist discovers community connection & flexibility are the key to making a difference through dental therapy #GoDentalTherapy #dentaltherapistspotlight

[\[link to Dental Therapist Spotlight: Sarah Chagnon\]](#)

Dental therapist increases access through innovation; school visits and teledentistry help reach more patients #GoDentalTherapy #dentaltherapistspotlight

[\[link to Dental Therapist Spotlight: Aveena Finkbonner\]](#)

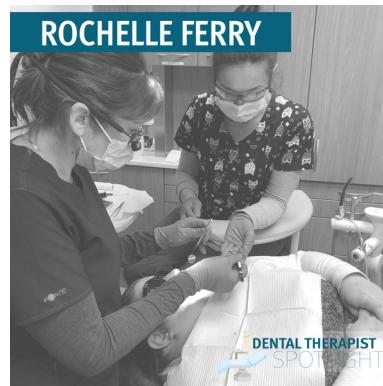
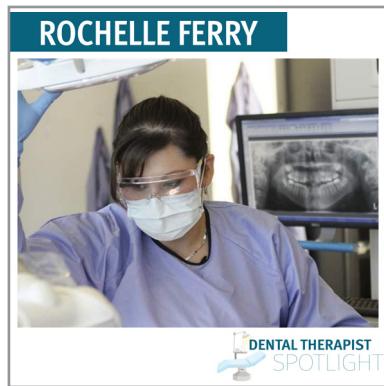
Dental therapist expands the dental care team by meeting patients in the community #GoDentalTherapy #dentaltherapistspotlight

[\[link to Dental Therapist Spotlight: Angela Johnson\]](#)

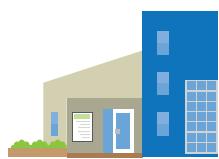
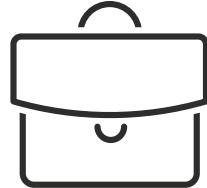
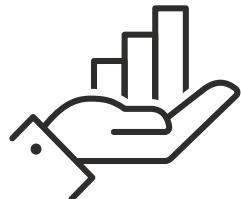
Early trauma leads to dental therapist's desire to expand care capacity, help others through relationship-based care #GoDentalTherapy #dentaltherapistspotlight

[\[link to Dental Therapist Spotlight: Rochelle Ferry\]](#)

Dental Therapist Spotlight Share Squares:



GRAPHICS



Fonts:

- **Meta Pro Condensed Bold**, Meta Pro Condensed Normal, Meta Pro Condensed Hairline
- **Arial Bold**, Arial Regular

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Additional Resources:

- Dental Therapy Resource Guide (<http://dentaltherapyresourceguide.wkkf.org/>)
- National Partnership for Dental Therapy (<https://www.dentaltherapy.org/>)
- Northwest Portland Indian Oral Health Board (<http://www.npaihb.org/ndti/>)
- @GoDentalTherapy (<https://twitter.com/GoDentalTherapy>)

Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the dental therapists who participated in our Dental Therapist Spotlights, as well as their respective clinics and colleagues, for allowing us to share their stories.

