



Dental Therapy: Advancing Economic Justice

California's Low-Income Communities Lack Access to Oral Health Care

Nearly 15 million people are enrolled in Medi-Cal. Yet, the majority of these individuals do not receive the oral health care they need and for which they are eligible. This not only impacts the health and well-being of Medi-Cal enrollees, but it also affects their financial stability and the state budget.

Only ½ of children enrolled in Medi-Cal receive dental care



Only ¼ of adults enrolled in Medi-Cal receive dental care

93%

93% of individuals living in poverty nationally have unmet dental needs, compared with 58% in high-income families.

10x more

Individuals living in poverty spend 10x more on dental services than do those in high-income families.

Economic Consequences of Poor Oral Health

When individuals cannot afford preventive oral health care and routine treatment, they can end up with untreated dental disease. This can lead to a myriad of financial consequences, including:



Difficulty obtaining work due to stigma around visible dental issues



Difficulty concentrating and missed school or work due to dental pain



Expensive, long-term health costs due to oral health problems



Debt for costly dental treatment of preventable conditions

Dental therapy can help! Dental therapists are licensed dental providers who provide preventive and routine care to those who need it most, including low-income, racially and ethnically diverse populations, often in community settings. They have been **providing culturally and linguistically appropriate, cost-effective, and high-quality** oral health care across the world for more than a century and across the U.S. for 20 years.



What Do Dental Therapists Do?

- Provide preventive and routine care, like exams, cleanings, and fillings
- Bring care to schools, community clinics, and other community locations
- Work as part of a dentist-led team, complementing the roles of dentists and dental hygienists
- Help get more people the care they need, when and where they need it
- Train at accredited institutions in a limited set of common procedures, resulting in more affordable, shorter, and accessible career pathways

Dental Therapy Can Help Californians and the State Budget



Dental therapy is a **cost-effective strategy to bring high-quality oral health care** to individuals who would otherwise go without needed care, while creating **educational and career opportunities** for communities that historically have been left out of the oral health care education system and workforce.

Supporting Dental Therapy in California Means:

- ✓ Advancing economic opportunities for low-income communities.
- ✓ Empowering clinics to serve more patients and hard-to-reach communities.
- ✓ Alleviating the costly consequences of untreated dental disease for individuals and the state budget.
- ✓ Treating patients who need routine care at a lower cost than a dentist, while dentists can focus their time on more complex patient needs.
- ✓ Creating accessible educational and career opportunities for communities that historically have been left out of the oral health care workforce.

Let's Bring Dental Therapy to California!

Learn more: COHEC.org

COHEC California Oral Health Equity Coalition
Communities Advancing Oral Health for All