



Dental Therapy: Advancing Racial Justice in California

Access to oral health care is an overlooked racial equity issue, with communities of color negatively affected at disproportionate rates. There are also significant racial disparities in the oral health care workforce, with the majority of oral health care providers being White.

Dental therapists are licensed dental professionals who bring needed preventive and select restorative oral health care to **the state's diverse communities and can help fill the racial gap in the oral health care workforce**. Dental therapy is an effective strategy to **improve culturally and linguistically competent oral health outcomes and provide inclusive career opportunities** for historically excluded communities.

Oral Health Care: Out of Reach for Many of California's Communities of Color

Communities that are Black, Indigenous, and people of color — especially those who are also low-income, uninsured, immigrant, limited English speaking, rural, and/or Tribal — have **significantly less access to oral health care** and tend to experience **more oral health problems** than their White, more affluent counterparts.

Racial Disparities in California's Oral Health Workforce

60%

60% of California's low-income adults are Black and Latinx, while just **8%** of California's dentists are Black and Latinx.

2/3

While more than 2/3 of individuals enrolled in Medi-Cal are people of color, only **15%** of dentists participate meaningfully in Medi-Cal for adults.

3x

Nationally, Black and Hispanic patients are **3 times more likely to have never been to a dentist** than White patients.

Dental Therapy Promotes Racial Justice

- Dental therapy is a **cost-effective strategy to bring high-quality oral health care** to individuals who would otherwise go without needed care.
- Dental therapists often share the backgrounds, languages, and life experiences of their patient communities, which **builds trust and leads to improved health outcomes**.





Dental Therapists are Licensed Professionals Who:

- Provide preventive and routine care, like exams, cleanings, and fillings.
- 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.

Dental therapy is a globally proven model, successfully implemented across the world for more than a century and in the U.S. for 20 years.

Dental Therapy Brings Care to Historically Excluded Communities



Addresses the chronic shortage of dental providers in rural communities, Tribal lands, and low-income communities



Increases care in non-traditional settings, like schools, nursing homes, and community centers



Bridges language and cultural gaps because dental therapists tend to come from the same background as the communities they serve



Builds trust and improves health outcomes for communities left behind by the current oral health care system

Creating a Workforce of Providers Who Reflect the Communities Most Impacted by Racial Disparities

- ✓ Because dental therapists perform a limited set of common procedures, they can be trained more quickly and at a lower cost than dentists.
- ✓ While dental therapy education is just as rigorous as dental school, it is more accessible to low-income communities than dental school.
- ✓ Dental therapy creates accessible education pathways and offers family-sustaining career opportunities for historically excluded communities.

Let's Bring Dental Therapy to California!

Learn more: COHEC.org