



*Northwest Portland Area
Indian Health Board*
Indian Leadership for Indian Health

Tribes Bring Dental Therapy to Oregon

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Coos Bay, OR-- Naomi Petrie, a member of the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, started providing services this week as the first dental health aide therapist (DHAT) to practice in Oregon. She recently graduated from the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium DHAT Education Program, where she spent the past 2 years learning the most common preventive and routine restorative care needed at her tribe's clinic in Coos Bay.

CTCLUSI's Chief Warren Brainard stated, "I am very proud that we were the first in Oregon to recognize the importance of this program for both our community and all tribal people."

DHATs are mid-level providers that have a limited number of procedures in their scope of practice—about 50 instead of the 500+ in a dentist's scope—and operate under general supervision of a dentist. Research shows they provide high-quality care and increase both access and oral health outcomes.

DHATs are not currently licensed in Oregon, but can operate under an Oregon law approved in 2011 that promotes innovative and data-driven improvements to the state's oral health system through dental pilot projects. CTCLUSI is one of 3 sites partnering with the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board in the Tribal Dental Health Aide Therapist pilot—the first pilot approved by the state in February of 2016. As part of the pilot, CTCLUSI has another student in training. The Coquille Indian Tribe and the Native American Rehabilitation Association are currently training students to become DHATs as well.

The pilot replicates what Alaska Natives did more than a decade ago by educating and hiring these providers to help their dentists extend care to more people. Dental therapists have since been authorized to practice in Minnesota, Vermont, Maine and in tribal communities in Washington state.

“In addition to expanding much needed care, this approach can create jobs in our tribal community, and extend economic benefit to our clinic and our patients. It also increases the number of American Indian dental providers that can offer culturally competent care to our members,” said Alexis Barry, CTCLUSI’s Chief Executive Officer.

“The suffering from oral health issues in the AI/AN population is unacceptable. The rates of untreated tooth decay are four times higher nationally for native preschool-aged children compared to their non-native peers,” said Joe Finkbonner, Executive Director of the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board. “This pilot aims to turn the tide on that disparity, create a sustainable solution to the oral health crisis facing our communities and provide a roadmap for all of Oregon to follow and learn from our experiences.”

The [Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians](#) are made up of 3 tribes (4 Bands): 2 bands of Coos Tribes: Hanis Coos (Coos Proper), Miluk Coos; Lower Umpqua Tribe; and Siuslaw Tribe. They operate a dental clinic in Coos Bay, OR primarily serving the AI/AN population in Coos, Curry, Lincoln, Lane, Douglas counties.

[Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board](#)’s mission is to eliminate health disparities and improve the quality of life of American Indians and Alaska Natives by supporting the Northwest Tribes of Oregon, Washington and Idaho in their delivery of culturally appropriate, high quality health care.