

NATIVE DENTAL THERAPY INITIATIVE

A project of the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board



October 2016

News and Updates

COMMUNITY HEALTH AIDE PROGRAM EXPANSION PROPOSAL NEARING END OF IHS CONSULTATION: COMMENTS DUE OCTOBER 27

Last June, in response to need for increased access to health care--including oral health care--in Indian Country, IHS Principal Deputy Director Mary Smith released a [draft policy statement](#) for consultation with Tribal Leaders. The expansion of Alaska's Community Health Aide Program to the lower 48 opens the doors to increased access to quality, tribally-based health care delivery systems. In an effort to hear from as many Tribes as possible, Director Smith extended the original comment deadline and has also convened two in-person and one phone consultation. **Comments are due October 27--please get yours in today!**

[Read the Dear Tribal Leader Letter from IHS, which includes instructions on where to send your letter](#)

Use a [template letter](#) drafted by Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board

In the News!

Indian Country Today: [INDIAN COUNTRY LEADS HEALTH REVOLUTION SWEEPING THE US](#)

The Register-Guard: [DENTAL THERAPISTS MIGHT FILL RURAL GAP](#)

National Public Radio: [A GOOD DENTIST IS HARD TO FIND IN RURAL AMERICA](#)

Americans for Tax Reform: [ATRE POLL SHOWS OVERWHELMING BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR CREATION OF MIDLLEVEL DENTAL PROVIDERS](#)

ALASKA NATIVE TRIBAL HEALTH CONSORTIUM DHAT EDUCATION PROGRAM PARTNERS WITH ILISAGVIK COLLEGE

Excerpted from ANTHC.org—The curriculum for Alaska's Dental Health Aide Therapist (DHAT) program was recently approved by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, through ANTHC's partnership with Iļisaġvik College in Barrow. This newly accredited degree program offers DHAT students the opportunity to earn an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree.



Jason Mecum, Coquille Indian Tribe, Class of 2018 DHAT Education Program

In addition to the two-year AAS degree, which helps create broader career pathways for DHAT graduates, Iļisaġvik will award a DHAT certificate upon completion of the first year of study. The program will still operate out of the existing sites in Anchorage and Bethel, but will now benefit from the institutional support available through Iļisaġvik. During their course of study, DHAT students have access to the full range of student services at the Tribal college, including financial aid, scholarship resources, academic support and tutoring. For more information: <http://anthc.org/dental-health-aide/>.

WASHINGTON TRIBES GEAR UP TO PASS LAW TO SUPPORT TRIBAL DHAT PROGRAMS

Washington Tribes are going back to the state legislature in 2017 in order to pass a law that would remove barriers to tribes fully exercising their sovereign right and responsibility to care for the oral health of their members. This law would:

- Lifts restriction on Tribes to use IHS funds for DHAT programs
- Allow DHAT services to be reimbursed by Medicaid and be eligible for up to 100% federal funding
- Lay the foundation for educating and building a DHAT workforce here in Washington.

This is a voluntary law that allows tribes to choose the best methods to serve their own people and have the necessary funding to employ those methods.

Join NDTI in working to pass this important legislation! Add this issue to your Tribal or organizational legislative agenda, and keep up-to-date on action needed by following us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Read the 2015/2016 Tribal DHAT bill [here](#).



Colville Vice Chairman Mel Tonasket rallies a group of Tribal leaders and lobbyists in pursuit of passing the DHAT bill this session!

CLICK ON THE THUMBNAIL TO DOWNLOAD AND SHARE OUR NEW USEFUL AND GRAPHICALLY-PLEASING FACTSHEETS!

Native Dental Therapy Initiative
DENTAL HEALTH AIDE THERAPISTS
MODERNIZING THE DENTAL TEAM

DENTAL HEALTH AIDE THERAPISTS

Dental Health Aide Therapists (DHATs) are part of a dentist-led team. Dental therapists were first introduced to the United States over 10 years ago by a consortium of Alaska Native tribal health organizations. Thanks to their leadership and courage, over 40,000 Native Alaskans now have access to regular dental care for the first time.

84.7% of the core dental therapists provide **PREVENTIVE** and **ROUTINE** care.

HIGHLY TRAINED AND SKILLED PROFESSIONALS

DHATs in Alaska are recruited from their communities and go back to serve their communities. DHAT training includes:

- One year of comprehensive and rigorous coursework
- 3,000 hours of clinical training
- 400-hour dentist-supervised preceptorship
- Mastery of 45 procedures in 2 years. Dentists learn 500+ procedures in 4 years of dental school.

By the time they begin practicing, Dental Health Aide Therapists have as much clinical experience in the procedures they are certified to perform as a dental school graduate.

DENTAL HEALTH AIDE THERAPISTS

- Educate patients about oral health and prevention
- Perform dental evaluations
- Give fluoride treatments
- Place sealants
- Clean teeth
- Place fillings
- Perform simple extractions

Native Dental Therapy Initiative
ORAL HEALTH IN INDIAN COUNTRY

Chronic pain, missing teeth, infections, and even life-threatening oral health emergencies are realities for American Indians/Alaska Natives. The Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board is working hand in hand with our member tribes to improve oral health outcomes through our Dental Support Center and our Native Dental Therapy Initiative. Despite the slow and steady improvements in the Portland Area, profound disparities continue to exist between AI/AN and non-AI/AN populations. It is clear that AI/AN people carry a disproportionate burden of oral disease. Lack of access to culturally competent, routine and preventive care stands in the way to improving oral health outcomes.

76% of AI/AN children by the age of 5 have experienced dental decay.

Over **2.4 MILLION** AI/ANs live in counties across the United States with dental health care professional shortages—half of AI/AN youth live in these dental healthcare professional shortage areas!

1 in 4 AI/AN people aged 35 to 44 have fewer than 20 of their natural teeth

2 out of 3 have untreated decay

The U.S. Indian Health Service spent an average of only 39¢ per person on dental care in 2009, compared with average per capita spending of \$273 nationwide!

Native Dental Therapy Initiative
DHATs GOOD FOR TRIBAL HEALTH
GOOD FOR TRIBAL ECONOMIES

Dental Health Aide Therapists (DHATs) are machine professionals that are part of a dentist-led team. They perform high-quality, routine and preventive dental care, increasing access to those who need it most. Recruits from, and returning to, their own communities, DHATs increase the number of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) providers that are best able to ensure culturally relevant care.

While helping improve oral health access and outcomes in AI/AN communities, DHATs can also be a cost-effective solution for tribal health programs.

- ➔ **DHATs cost only about \$.56 for every dollar they generate!** This allows dental teams to see more Medicaid and under-insured patients of existing reimbursement rates, and cut those cost savings into further expanding care.
- ➔ **DHATs, learning about half the salary of a dentist, can perform many routine procedures typically done by a dentist:**
 - Swinomish Indian Tribal Community analyzed the procedures done at their dental clinic and found that a DHAT could perform 80% of the procedures being done by the dentist.
 - A published study of person-of-care that could be performed by machine professionals at a series of safety-net clinics found that DHATs could perform between 61 and 92% of the procedures, depending on clinic type!
- ➔ **DHATs have a select scope of practice that includes both preventive and restorative procedures and allows providers to work at the top of their scope.** This team approach increases efficiency and supports the clinic's bottom line.
- ➔ **DHATs can decrease costly dental-related emergency room visits by increasing access to preventive dental services and continuity of care.**
- ➔ **DHATs that stay in their community generate economic benefits for themselves and their Tribes.** The accelerated, post-secondary degree training program offers a very realistic career pathway and results in a living-wage job. Tribes benefit from these jobs coming from and staying in the community.

Questions or comments? Contact Pam Johnson, [Native Dental Therapy Initiative](#), pjohnson@npaihb.org, 206-755-4309

Follow us on: