

NATIVE DENTAL THERAPY INITIATIVE

A project of the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board



June 2016

News and Updates

IHS Releases Draft Policy Statement for consultation: Creating a National Community Health Aide Program, including DHATs

In response to the need for increased access to health care, IHS Principal Deputy Director Mary Smith has released a [draft policy statement](#) for consultation with tribal leaders. The national expansion of Alaska's Community Health Aide Program opens the door to increased use of quality, tribally-based health care delivery systems. It also could provide a pathway to allow Tribes to use IHS resources for dental therapists practicing in their clinics. Right now the Indian Health Care Improvement Act restricts those resources unless the state in which the Tribe resides has authorized dental therapists by law. The American Dental Association, which successfully lobbied to have the restrictions included in the IHCA, has since successfully lobbied state legislatures across the country to obstruct most dental therapy legislation. Read the [Dear Tribal Leaders Letter and information on how to submit comments](#), due July 29.

Meet three students starting the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium DHAT Education Program this July!



Marissa Gardner, Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians

I am 27 and currently live in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho. Some things that I enjoy include hiking, fishing, doing crafts, exploring new places.

Making a difference in life has always been a goal for me and what better way than through dentistry—to make one smile and live a healthier and happier lifestyle. The DHAT Program is truly a blessing! Joining the program was an easy answer for me. Now by gaining the education and training needed I can give back to my community and help others. Looking forward to becoming a role model in my Tribal Community and teaching others not only the importance of dental care but also the negative effects of tobacco use and sugar intake.

I've been mentally preparing for long hours of homework and hard work to be successful throughout the program. My family has been my number one supporter. They are all excited for me and can't wait to see outcomes of what the DHATs can achieve in Tribal Communities.

In the News!

The Nation's Health (APHA): [DENTAL HEALTH THERAPISTS BRINGING ORAL HEALTH CARE TO US TRIBAL COMMUNITIES: OPENING UP ACCESS](#)

New York Times: [A NEED FOR DENTAL THERAPISTS](#) (Federal Trade Commission LTE)

KING 5 News: [TRIBE DRILLING DOWN ON THEIR DENTAL RIGHTS](#)

New York Times: [WHERE DENTISTS ARE SCARCE, AMERICAN INDIANS FORGE A PATH TO BETTER CARE](#)

NPR/KPLU: [CONFRONTING DENTAL DECAY IN INDIAN COUNTRY](#)

Oregonian: [TRIBAL PILOT PROGRAM MAY POINT TO DENTAL-CARE FUTURE FOR ALL OREGONIANS \(OPINION\)](#)

Congratulations Vermont!

This June, Vermont joined other states and Tribes across the country in recognizing the value of dental therapy to increase access to those most in need. Momentum is building across the country for this proven solution. [See the map!](#)

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Hi my name is **Jason Mecum** and I am a proud member of the **Coquille Tribe**. I currently live in Milwaukie Oregon which is a small suburb of Portland. For fun I love fishing, hunting, snowboarding, and I do not like mayonnaise. I choose the DHAT program because I want to make a difference in peoples lives. Dental care is one thing that is not available to some people, and being able to provide this service is going to be very rewarding. The changes of moving to Alaska for the program are really going to be different. But thankfully there is a strong support team of teachers and the students that I can rely on to help me through the next 2 years. Personally I am very excited about getting to Bethel and seeing a whole new cultural aspect of what the Native Alaskan life is like. For my tribe the DHAT is going to give them another option to see a qualified provider to help them with any dental needs that they have.



Alexandria Jones, Coquille Indian Tribe. I am 24 years old and I am from beautiful Southern Oregon. I have been a dental assistant for 2 years. I have a 7 year old daughter, Audrina. I come from a large family and spend a majority of my time with them. I also enjoy camping, hiking and snowboarding.

Growing up I did not have access to regular dental care. I know firsthand what it is like to not have preventive dental care. Therefore, I feel very passionately about being able to help others who have limited accessto regular dental care. I think the DHAT program has the unique potential to fill a tremendous need in under-served communities such as mine. I would like to help adults and children have regular dental care, and avoid future dental problems.

I work with an amazing dentist currently, Dr. Jennifer Callans. She has trained me since I graduated dental assisting school. Since I told her I was accepted to the DHAT program she has been teaching me more about different methods for fillings, extractions and other dental procedures. I feel extremely prepared and confident thanks to my amazing mentor.

I feel privileged and honored to be able to give back to my community. I will be one of the very first DHATs in my Tribal Region. There is an overwhelming need for dental care in Native American populations. There are many people who experience pain and suffering that could be avoided with preventive and proactive dental care. I believe the DHAT program will be a great help to many people and I am so excited to be part of it.



Congratulations Naomi!

Naomi Petrie, Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, received her White Coat June 3rd after successfully completing year one of the DHAT Education Program! Pictured here with siblings Jeremy, Marie and Matthew.

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

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Oral Health Promotion Interview: *Kristina Hyatt, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Miss Native American USA*

Why did you choose to make oral health a focus for your education efforts in your position as Miss Native American USA? As a dental hygienist with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Children’s Dental Program, I am well aware of the oral health and access to care issues Native Americans are facing throughout the country. As a hygienist, I feel as though it is my duty to share my knowledge with our people, especially the children. I knew that holding the title of Miss Native American USA would allow me the opportunity to make my voice heard and create awareness about the importance of oral health care. It’s not the norm for a titleholder to have a platform that promotes the importance of a healthy smile, but it’s what I’m passionate about. I want everyone to have a beautiful, healthy smile because we have so much to smile about. We are all truly blessed.

How do you see dental therapy increasing access and outcomes for people in Indian Country? Dental therapy definitely has the potential to improve oral health and access to care across Indian Country. I work at the IHS dental clinic in Cherokee, North Carolina and I get a glimpse of the access to care issues that Native Americans everywhere are facing. We are fortunate to have the best pediatric dentist that I have ever met. Unfortunately, there is only one Dr. Joyce Biberica, DMD. Dental therapists would allow dentists to focus primarily on what are considered to be more serious cases, therefore, relieving the patient load and allowing them to be treated sooner. I have had the opportunity to visit several tribes across the country and learned more about the dental healthcare services that they are provided with on their respected reservations. Some of the things I learned literally broke my heart, especially for the children. I learned that one clinic doesn’t have a dentist that will see children, so they have to be referred out to another location over an hour away – the people are already living in a poverty-stricken areas, why present them with one more challenge of coming up with gas money and transportation just to get treatment (s). Many times, those children end up not having their treatments completed and go without proper oral health care.

Do you see dental therapy as a career pathway for yourself, and for others in your community? I have considered pursuing a career as a dental therapist in the near future. Dental therapists are in demand across Indian Country and I became aware of them several years ago and learned that training is offered in Alaska. Ever since then, I would often ask my parents if they would move to Alaska with me whenever I decided to obtain training. I would love to see more Native Americans pursuing this particular career path, in an effort to make a positive difference for Native Americans everywhere. We, as Native Americans, need to step up and take on the roles of dental healthcare providers.



PHOTO CREDIT: Stacie and Donavon Barney Photography

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