



# Native Dental Therapy Initiative

## DHATs GOOD FOR TRIBAL HEALTH GOOD FOR TRIBAL ECONOMIES



Dental Health Aide Therapists (DHATs) are mid-level professionals that are part of a dentist-led team. They perform high-quality, routine and preventive dental care, expanding access to those who need it most. Recruited 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 \$.30 for every dollar they generate<sup>1</sup>** This allows dental teams to see more Medicaid and under-insured patients at existing reimbursement rates, and put those cost savings into further expanding care.
- ▶▶ **DHATs, earning 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 50% of the procedures being done by the dentist.
  - A published study of portion of care that could be performed by mid-level professionals at a series of safety net clinics found that DHATs could perform between 64 and 90% of the procedures, depending on clinic type.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶▶ **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 those jobs coming from and staying in the community.

<sup>1</sup>Kim, Frances M. "Economic Viability of Dental Therapists." Community Catalyst. May 2013  
<sup>2</sup>Phillips, Elizabeth, et. al. "Safety Net Care and Midlevel Dental Practitioners: A Case Study of the Portion of Care That Might Be Performed Under Various Setting and Scope-of-Practice Assumptions." American Journal of Public Health, September 2015