

# NATIVE DENTAL THERAPY INITIATIVE

A project of the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board



March 2017

## News and Updates

### DENTAL THERAPY FOR WASHINGTON TRIBES: FIRST LAW SIGNED BY GOVERNOR IN 2017



On February 22, Washington Governor Jay Inslee signed SSB 5079 recognizing Tribal Dental Health Aide Therapists (DHAT) and securing access to federal funding needed to sustain clinics that use this mid-level provider. SSB 5079 sailed through this year's legislative session with bi-partisan support — its 4th year.

Senator John McCoy, D-Tulalip, first started working on this issue after the Alaska DHAT program started 12 years ago, and is the prime sponsor of the bill that was signed today.

Brian Cladoosby, Chairman of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, and President of the National

Congress of American Indians stated, "This bill is first and foremost about sovereignty—the right and responsibility of tribal governments to take care of their people, including oral health. DHAT programs are a proven, tribal solution to the oral health crisis in Indian Country that increases and improves access, increases the number of native oral health providers, and reduces costs."

One year ago, the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community hired DHAT Daniel Kennedy, who became the first tribally-licensed DHAT in the lower-48. Because Swinomish created their own licensing board under their innate sovereign authority, the state had no role in approving or denying the license. *continued next page...*

#### QUICK LINKS!

[Enrolled SSB 5079](#)

[SSB 5079 History and Sponsors](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Washington Tribes Broad Support for SSB 5079 Letter](#)

### In the News!

The Omak-Okanogan County Chronicle: [LAW AIMS TO IMPROVE TRIBAL DENTAL CARE](#)

KNKX—NPR: [TRIBES PLANNING NEXT STEPS NOW THAT DENTAL THERAPY BILL IS LAW](#)

indianz.com: [MARK TRAHANT: A VICTORY ON INDIAN HEALTH IN WASHINGTON STATE](#)

The Olympian: [LONG-SOUGHT BILL TO HELP DENTAL CARE ON TRIBAL LAND FIRST TO PASS LEGISLATURE](#)

Lewis County Chronicle: [BILL IMPROVING DENTAL CARE ON RESERVATIONS INTRODUCED](#)

Indian Country Media Network: [OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO DENTAL CARE ONE KID AT A TIME](#)



Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board is honored and excited to welcome the [Native American Rehabilitation Association of the Northwest](#) (NARA) as our newest site participating in the Tribal Dental Health Aide Therapist [Pilot Project](#). Founded in 1970, NARA is an Indian-owned, Indian-operated, non-profit agency in Portland, OR that operates a residential family treatment center, an outpatient treatment center, a child and family services center, two primary health care clinic, several adult mental health locations, a dental clinic, and transitional housing for AI/AN women and children. The dental clinic is the newest clinic and opened in May of 2016. In the first 5 months they saw 799 new patients.

## WELCOME NARA NW!

NARA provides dental services primarily to AI/ANs—60% of their patient base, representing 259 different tribes—and Medicaid eligible and uninsured clients. NARA does outreach to the 9 tribes in Oregon and currently has a waiting list because they do not have enough providers to see all of the patients they have.

Integrating DHATs into their dental team will allow NARA to focus on important long term goals: increase the number of completed treatment plans, shorten waiting lists to make both basic services and more advanced services available in a timely manner to patients, and increase oral health education through community outreach.

NARA plans to send a student to the [ANTHC DHAT Education Program](#) this summer.

### ***DENTAL THERAPY FOR WA TRIBES continued...***

However, for Tribes that have fewer resources and infrastructure to license their own providers, this new law recognizes the authority of a tribal government to hire federally-certified DHATs.

Mel Tonasket, Vice Chair of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, and former Washington State Board of Health Commissioner added, “Our Tribe has 9000 members and a reservation that stretches over 1.3 million acres of remote NE Washington. Like every other part of rural Washington, we have challenges to recruit, hire, and retain dental providers. We need providers that come from our community and want to serve our community.”

Importantly, the law directs the Washington Health Care Authority to work with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to allow for Medicaid reimbursement and clears the way for an expansion of DHATs in Washington.

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

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