



# NW Dental Health Aide Program FAQs

## Program basics

### What is the Northwest Dental Health Aide Program? (NW DHAP)

The NW Dental Health Aide Program is a program under the Community Health Aide Program and is operated by the Tribal Community Health Provider Program (TCHPP). TCHPP operates under the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB), at the direction and resolution of the 43 federally recognized tribes in Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

The Community Health Aide Program (CHAP) is authorized by federal law for operation in Indian Country only, to improve health status among the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population nationwide. Dental Health Aides must be employed by the Indian Health Service (IHS) or a tribe or tribal organization.

Dental Health Aides (DHAs) are primary providers that focus on prevention and basic oral health procedures.

**There are four categories of dental health aides**, all of whom work under the direct, indirect or general supervision of a licensed dentist:

- **Primary Dental Health Aides (PDHA) I and II**
- **Expanded Function Dental Health Aides (EFDHA) I and II**
- **Dental Health Aide Hygienists (DHAH)**
- **Dental Health Aide Therapists (DHAT)**





## What is the legislative basis for the program?

The Community Health Aide Program was developed in Alaska in the 1950's in response to a number of health concerns in rural Alaska. In 1968, the Community Health Aide Program received formal congressional recognition and federal funding. It was authorized exclusively for Alaska in the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA) until 2010, when CHAP was nationalized as part of the IHCIA permanent reauthorization, with the ultimate goal of certifying health aides to improve health status among AI/AN people nationwide.

For over 60 years, CHAP has proven to be a cost effective, efficient and essential component in improving the health of the AI/AN people by decreasing morbidity and mortality. This innovative program has become a model for the delivery of primary health care services for the AI/AN people in Alaska and is now available nationwide.

The Community Health Aide Program, including the Dental Health Aide Program, does not fall within the parameters of State Practice Acts by design. Instead, Community Health Aides, including Dental Health Aides, are federally certified by a CHAP Board, which is approved by the IHS Area Office. In the Portland Area, the certification board is the Portland Area Community Health Aide Program Certification Board (PACCB).

## What are the benefits of pursuing certification under the Portland Area CHAP Certification Board (PACCB)?

- CHAP allows tribes to provide care in a culturally safe manner
- As a federally sanctioned program, DHAs have a larger scope of practice that may be outside the state dental practice acts allowing them to provide more care to Tribal communities
- Most procedures are performed under general or indirect supervision
- DHAs services are Medicaid/Medicare billable

## Who retains the liability for Health Aide practice?

The Community Health Aide/Practitioner program is covered by the federal tort claims act. Federal and Tribal employers are covered.

Learn more at: <https://www.ihs.gov/riskmanagement/ftca/>



## How much do DHAs get paid?

This is a function and determination of the individual Tribal Health Organization. Current Dental Health Aides have a range comparable to similar dental providers. The NW DHAP will be working on providing guiding salary information based on dental provider salary ranges in the Northwest.

## Are DHA services billable?

The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and the Washington Health Care Authority (WHCA) have each successfully added Community Health Aide Providers (CHAPs) as recognized provider types in their respective Medicaid State Plan Amendment (SPAs). Once these CHAP SPAs are fully implemented, services provided by federally certified Community Health Aide Provider's, including Dental Health Aides (DHAs), Behavioral Health Aides (BHAs), and Community Health Aides (CHAs), will be eligible for Medicaid reimbursement when delivered by Tribes in Oregon and Washington.

## Once certified, are there requirements Dental Health Aids must fulfill for recertification?

All types of Dental Health Aides need to renew their certificates every two years. During the 2-year certification period the DHA must maintain BLS certification and fulfill continuing dental education and directly supervised clinical care requirements:

- Twenty-four hours of continuing dental education (CDE) is required to maintain their certification. CDE must pertain to their course of study subjects or competencies and directly relate to the clinical practice of a dental health aide.
- Dental Health Aides must meet satisfactory performance under the direct supervision of a dentist, dental hygienist, or dental health aide therapist, depending on the DHA level, a minimum of each procedure within their scope for which the DHA is certified, at least once. When supervision for a DHAT is required it must be provided by a dentist.

## Is financial aid provided for Dental Health Aides?

Currently, the NW DHAP is providing Primary Dental Health Aide (PDHA) training at no cost and the Expanded Function Dental Health Aide (EFDHA) program is in development.

Funding has been available and may be available in the future for students who wish to attend the dəxʷəyəbus Dental Therapy Program at Skagit Valley College through the NW DHAP program, and students can apply for financial aid, grants and scholarships. In addition, as of 2023, a dental therapist is a profession that is approved under the IHS student loan repayment program.







## Training & Scope of Practice

### Primary Dental Health Aides (PDHA)

In the Northwest Area (OR, WA, ID), the NW DHAP is offering a blended program with didactic education provided virtually and lab/ clinical skills clinics in person. All training is done by qualified instructors and follows the training requirements set forth by the PACCB.

Once the training is complete, the PDHA candidate must complete a directly supervised preceptorship in their own clinic under a dentist, dental health aide therapist, or dental hygienist, depending on the the DHA level, in the skillset(s) they are seeking certification in.

Primary Dental Health Aides practice under the general supervision of a Dentist or DHAT. PDHAs trained in the NW have the option of receiving college credit from Salish Kootenai College's CODA-accredited Dental Assisting program for competencies completed.

PDHAs are not required to be dental assistants prior to training, however, existing dental assistants that are trained as PDHAs allow clinics to utilize them as dental assistants with expanded functions. PDHAs provide prevention services chairside and through community outreach programs. PDHAs have a similar scope as dental assistants, with the benefit of being federally certified, allowing to perform much of their scope under general supervision.

### PDHA Scope of Practice

- **Primary Dental Health Aide I** – Oral hygiene education, nutritional counseling, antimicrobial application and all types of fluoride application under general supervision.
- **Primary Dental Health Aide II** – a PDHA II can provide all the services of a PDHA I and with specific skill set training can apply sealants, take x-rays, dental assist, provide coronal dental prophylaxis, and perform Atraumatic Restorative Treatment under general or indirect supervision.





## Expanded Function Dental Health Aides (EFDHA)

Applicants must have completed PDHA II training or be a dental assistant and have completed PDHA I and the dental assisting skill set course prior to training. EFDHAs can provide dental prophylaxis or basic restorative services depending on their training.

There are two types of EFDHAs in the CHAP program: a periodontal EFDHA and a restorative EFDHA.

All preceptorships must be done in the student's Tribal dental clinic. Restorative EFDHAs have a preceptorship of 800 hours or 6 months to complete under direct supervision of a dentist or DHAT. Perio EFDHAs have a preceptorship that is based on the number of dental cleanings completed.

### EFDHA Scope of Practice

- **Expanded Function Dental Health Aide I** – a EFDHA I can perform coronal prophylaxis and/or simple restorations.
- **Expanded Function Dental Health Aide II** – an EFDHA II can perform EFDHA I duties and complex restorations

The NW DHA program will begin development of EFDHA training in the near future.

## Dental Health Aide Hygienist (DHAH)

A Dental Health Aide Hygienist must have received their training through an accredited dental hygiene program or a CHAP board-approved dental hygiene program.

## Dental Health Aide Therapist (DHAT)

In the Northwest area, ideally students are selected and sponsored by their tribes. Prior to certification and upon graduation, students must be employed by the Indian Health Service or a tribe or tribal health program.

Training is provided at dəxʷəyabus Dental Therapy Program at Skagit Valley College and Swinomish Dental Clinic. The 3-year curriculum program consists of nine consecutive quarters of intensive academic and clinical work and students gain an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) in Dental Therapy. Twelve students per cohort are accepted to begin each Fall.

*[more DHAT information on following page]*



## Dental Health Aide Therapist (cont.)

Minimum DHAT qualifications to apply include:

- High school diploma or equivalent
- 200 hours of dental-related experience
- Clinical site for Qtr. 9-Preceptorship confirmed & Supervising Dentist committed as part of required clinical experience
- Pass a background check & drug screening + up to date vaccination record for healthcare workplace

DHATs who have graduated from a Dental Therapy program outside of the Portland Area may apply for PACCB certification if they meet the requirements of the PACCB Standards & Procedures. Upon successful completion of the preceptorship the DHAT can apply for certification. Once certified, the Dental Health Aide Therapist will be supervised by a dentist in their clinic who is responsible for writing the DHAT's standing orders and the oversight and recertification of the DHAT.

Dentists familiar with the dental health aide program can provide supervision of DHATs through chart review, consultation, and patient examination.

### DHAT Scope of Practice

The DHAT is the only type of DHA that must follow state practice laws. The procedures listed below are allowable according to the PACCB Standards & Procedures. These may vary by state law.

#### ***Diagnostic***

- Comprehensive, periodic and problem focused exams
- Dental radiographs and diagnostic casts

#### ***Restorative Care***

- Composites, Amalgams, prefabricated crowns

#### ***Oral Surgery***

- Routine, simple extractions (with prior consultation)
- Dry socket treatment
- Tooth reimplantation and stabilization
- Suturing of traumatic intra oral wounds less than 2 cm

#### ***Hygiene and Preventive***

- Adult and child prophylaxis
- Fluoride application
- Oral hygiene instruction and nutritional counseling
- Sealants
- Community oral health promotion projects

#### ***Endodontic Care***

- Direct and indirect pulp cap
- Pulpotomies of primary dentition

#### ***Miscellaneous***

- Palliative treatment, minor
- Use of local anesthetic





# Where can I get more information about Dental Health Aides?

For more information  
please do not hesitate to reach out to us at the  
**Northwest Dental Health Aide Program!**



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**Visit the Tribal Community Health Provider  
Program website for more information  
about the Portland Area Community Health  
Aide Program at:**

<https://www.tchpp.org/>

