

Dental Therapists: Ensuring Access to Affordable Dental Care in Connecticut

What is a dental therapist?

- Dental therapists are highly-trained dental providers who work as part of the dental team, similar to a physician assistant in medicine.
- Dental therapists provide restorative and preventive care such as exams and filling cavities.
- Dental therapists work under the supervision of dentists, with teams of dental hygienists and dental assistants. After a period of direct supervision, they can work remotely from their supervising dentists, collaborating via telehealth technology.

How do dental therapists improve dental care?

- Dental therapists can work in traditional dental clinics, but they can also treat patients in community settings like schools, nursing homes, and mobile clinics.
- Dental therapists are cost-effective to train and employ, enabling dentists and community health centers to see more Medicaid patients, reduce patient wait times, and divert emergency room usage.

How do dental therapists help communities?

- Many communities and public health settings struggle to recruit and retain dental providers. Dental therapy focuses on educating individuals from underserved communities to meet these critical needs.
- Dental therapists can be trained in community colleges, making the education accessible and affordable, and creating well-paying jobs in underserved communities.

Policy Recommendation:

Update requirements to align with Federally recognized accreditation standards and **establish a dental therapy license** (currently dental therapy is authorized in CT, but there is no license). These changes are necessary for developing the profession in CT, financing the services through billing, and allowing Connecticut's academic institutions to create the most cost effective and beneficial programs for students and their future employers and patients.



Dental Provider Comparison

	Dental Hygiene	Dental Therapy	Dentistry
Prerequisite	0-1 year of college classes	0-1 year of college classes	Bachelor's degree
Minimum length of education program (per the CODA accreditation standards, the US Dept of Education accepted accreditation standards)	2 academic years	3 academic years	4 academic years
Number of procedures the provider can perform	~40	~75	~500
Expertise	Focus on Gums and Preventive routine care, i.e. cleanings	Focus on Teeth and Restorative routine care, i.e. fillings	Focus on Teeth and Expansive Restorative care
Anticipated Annual Compensation, Informed by Education Costs	~\$77,000 ⁱ	~\$77,000; ~\$120,000+ if dual degree required	~\$164,000 ⁱⁱ

ⁱ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Dental Hygienists*. Updated May 1, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/Healthcare/Dental-hygienists.htm#tab-1>

ⁱⁱ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Dentists*. Updated May 1, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/dentists.htm>

