



MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT

Licensing Dental Therapy

A.5373 (Woerner)/S.4428 (Fernandez)

April 21, 2023

The Community Health Care Association of New York State (CHCANYS) is in strong support of A.5373 (Woerner)/S.4428 (Fernandez) which would allow New York to license and provide Medicaid reimbursement for dental therapists and advanced dental therapists.

CHCANYS is the primary care association for New York's federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), also known as community health centers (CHCs). Located in medically underserved areas, CHCs serve more than 2.3 million patients each year at 800 sites across the State, providing comprehensive primary and preventive care regardless of insurance status, immigration status, or ability to pay. Among CHC patients, 89% are low income, 68% are Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and other people of color, 13% are uninsured, and 59% are enrolled in Medicaid or Child Health Plus.

CHCs are often the only source of affordable and accessible dental care in underserved communities. However, CHCs are experiencing dental workforce shortages and struggle to compete with private practices for the limited pool of dental providers. The scarcity of dental providers disproportionately impacts low-income New Yorkers and people of color, who utilize less dental care than the rest of the population in part due to the limited availability of dental services.¹ It is estimated that 1 in 5 people in all age groups have an untreated dental issue, which can have serious impacts on patient health and quality of life.² For example, dental disease is correlated with being at higher risk for chronic diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.³

Currently, New York does not license and subsequently cannot provide Medicaid reimbursement for dental therapists (DTs) and advanced dental therapists (ADTs) – to the detriment of New York's health center patients. In states where they are recognized, DTs and ADTs provide routine restorative, oral evaluations, minor surgeries, and other services within their scope of practice. Long-term studies have found that adding these services increase usage of preventative dental services in medically underserved areas.⁴ In 2009, Minnesota became the first state to license dental therapists and advanced dental therapists and many states have since followed suit, but New York continues to lag behind.⁵ Licensing and reimbursing for DTs and ADTs would expand access to preventative dental services by addressing the increasing demand for dental services, especially in underserved communities.

CHCANYS strongly urges the New York State Legislature to pass A.5373/S.4428 which will alleviate New York's dental workforce shortages and expand access preventative dental services. Comprehensive health and well-being cannot be achieved without expanding access to oral health.

For more information, contact Marie Mongeon, Vice President of Policy: mmongeon@chcanys.org.

¹ <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0234459#sec013>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4765973/>

³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31560644/>

⁴ https://www.chwsny.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CHWS_Contributions_of_DTs_ADTs_at_Apple_Tree_Dental_2020.pdf

⁵ <https://www.health.state.mn.us/facilities/ruralhealth/emerging/dt/index.html>