

Expanding Access to Dental Care

SB 1254 by Sen. Collins/HB 1173 by Rep. Chaney

Overview

According to data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Report on Dental Care Health Professional Shortage Areas,” 6 million Floridians live in dental deserts. This is the largest state population living without access to basic dental care in our country. Further, a 2023 workforce study by the Florida Department of Health (DOH) found that nearly 8 in 10 Florida dentists do not accept Medicaid patients. Florida hospitals, in 2020, billed approximately \$330 million for over 110,000 emergency room visits that stemmed from preventable oral health problems.

These bills seek to increase access to dental care in Florida by allowing for reimbursement from Medicaid for dental services provided by mobile dental units and expanding the dental workforce.

Mobile Dental Units

- Allows, but does not require, Medicaid to reimburse mobile dental units owned or operated by (or has a contractual relationship with) a health access setting providing dental services to adults or children. This language seeks to increase the availability of dental services in underserved areas.

Dental Therapists

Licensure

- Establishes the licensure of mid-level dental providers called Dental Therapists (DT) to work under the supervision of a dentist to provide routine dental care like exams and fillings. Dental therapists are like physician extenders, allowing dentists to focus on more complicated care.
- Provides persons applying to the Department of Health to be a Florida licensed dental therapist must:
 - Be at least 18 years of age.
 - Graduate from a dental therapy college or school accredited by the American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) or any other dental therapy accrediting entity recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.
 - Have successfully completed a dental therapy practical or clinical exam produced by the American Board of Dental Examiners (ADEX). Applicants failing to pass the exam three times cannot retake it unless they complete additional education requirements specified by the board. If ADEX has not established a dental therapy examination, the Board of Dentistry shall administer or approve an alternative examination.
 - Have successfully completed a written exam on Florida laws and rules regulating the practice of dental therapy
 - Have not been disciplined by a board, except for citation offenses or minor violations.
 - Have not been convicted of or pled nolo contendere to, regardless of adjudication, any felony or misdemeanor related to the practice of a healthcare profession.
- Provides persons who meet the above requirements, have successfully completed the ADEX exam in another state, and have passed a comparable exam administered or approved by that state’s licensing authority shall receive a Florida dental therapy license as long as the Board of Dentistry determines that state’s exam is substantially similar to the Florida exam.

Scope of Practice

- Allows Florida licensed dental therapists to perform dental therapy services under the general supervision of a dentist laid out in a written collaborative management agreement between the dentist and the dental therapist. Dental therapy services include all of the following:

- All services, treatments, and competencies identified by the CODA in the commission's Accreditation Standards for Dental Therapy Education Programs.
- The following state-specific services, if the dental therapist's education included curriculum content satisfying the CODA criteria for state-specific dental therapy services:
 - Evaluating radiographs
 - Placement of space maintainers
 - Pulpotomies on primary teeth
 - Dispensing and administering nonopioid analgesics, including nitrous oxide, anti-inflammatories, and antibiotics, as authorized by the supervising dentist and within the parameters of the collaborative management agreement.
 - Oral evaluation and assessment of dental disease and formulation of an individualized treatment plan if authorized by the supervising dentist and subject to any conditions, limitations, and protocols specified by the supervising dentist in the collaborative management agreement.

Administering Local Anesthesia

- Allows dental therapists to administer local anesthesia, including intraoral block or soft tissue infiltration anesthesia, or both if she or he has completed a course in the administration of local anesthesia offered by a CODA-accredited dental or dental hygiene program. This provision mirrors the current law for dental hygienists to administer local anesthesia.
- Requires dental therapist to have a current basic or advanced cardiac life support certification and apply for a certificate from the Board of Dentistry for administering local anesthesia.

Florida Licensed Dentist Control of Dental Therapists

- Requires dental therapists, before performing any of the dental therapy services, to enter into a written collaborative management agreement with their supervising Florida licensed dentist which includes the following information:
 - Practice settings where services and the populations to be served may be provided.
 - Any limitations on the services that may be provided, including the level of supervision required by the supervising dentist. This may include telehealth.
 - Age- and procedure-specific practice protocols, including case selection criteria, assessment guidelines, and imaging frequency.
 - A procedure for creating and maintaining dental records for the dental therapist's patients.
 - A plan to manage medical emergencies in each practice setting where the dental therapist provides care.
 - A quality assurance plan for monitoring the dental therapist's care, including patient care review, referral follow-up, and a quality assurance chart review.
 - Protocols for the dental therapist to administer and dispense medications, including the specific conditions and circumstances under which the medications are to be dispensed and administered.
 - Criteria for providing care to patients with specific medical conditions or complex medication histories, including requirements for consultation before initiating care.
 - Supervision criteria.
 - A plan for providing clinical resources and referrals in situations that are beyond the capabilities of the dental therapist.
- Provides that the supervising dentist in the written collaborative management agreement may:
 - Determine the number of hours of practice a dental therapist must complete under direct or indirect supervision before performing any abovementioned services authorized under general supervision.

- Restrict or limit the dental therapist's practice to less than the full scope authorized by statute for dental therapists.
- Authorize a dental therapist to provide services to a patient before the dentist examines or diagnoses the patient if the patient is subsequently referred to a dentist for any needed additional services that exceed the dental therapist's scope of practice.
- Provides the supervising dentist is responsible for all services authorized and performed by the dental therapist and for providing follow-up services by a dentist for services that exceed the dental therapist's scope of practice or authorization.

Continuing Education

- Requires dental therapists to complete at least 24 hours, but not more than 36 hours, biennially of continuing education in dental subjects in programs approved by the board or in equivalent continuing education programs.
- Allows individuals licensed as both a dental therapist and a dental hygienist to use 1 hour of continuing education that is approved for dental therapy and dental hygiene education to satisfy both dental therapy and dental hygiene continuing education requirements.

Board of Dentistry

- Requires the Board, 28 months after the first dental therapy license is granted, to establish a Council on Dental Therapy appointed by the board chair. The Chair of the Council must be a Board member and the members must be three dental therapists actively engaged in dental therapy in Florida.
- The must meet at least three times per year and is charged with the responsibility of developing rules and policies for recommendation to the board on matters regarding the part of dentistry consisting of educational, preventative, or therapeutic dental therapy services; licensure, discipline, or regulation; and education.
- The Board must adopt rules and guidelines to administer and enforce the dental therapy continuing education requirements and is allowed to excuse licensees, as a group or as individuals, from all or part of the continuing education requirements if an unusual circumstance, emergency, or hardship prevented compliance the continuing education statute.

Department of Health Progress Report

- Requires the Department of Health (DOH), in consultation with the Board of Dentistry and the Agency for Health Care Administration (AHCA), to submit a progress report to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by July 1, 2027. A final report must be provided 4 years after the first dental therapy license is issued. The reports must include all of the following information and recommendations:
 - Progress made to implement dental therapy training programs, licensing, and Medicaid reimbursement.
 - Data demonstrating the effects of dental therapy in Florida on patient access to dental services, costs to dental providers, patients, dental insurance carriers, and the State of Florida; and the quality and safety of dental services.
 - Specific recommendations for any legislative, administrative, or regulatory reform relating to the practice of dental therapy.
 - Any other information the department deems appropriate.