



444 N. Michigan Ave.
Suite 3400
Chicago, IL 60611
P: 312/440-8900
F: 312/467-1806
www.adha.org

Contact:
Natalie Judd
natalie@bigvoicecomm.com
203-605-9515

Statement from the American Dental Hygienists' Association on the December 7 Issue of *Health Affairs* on Oral Health

The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) is pleased that *Health Affairs* recognizes the enormous impact oral health has on the overall public health system in the U.S. by devoting an entire issue to the subject. ADHA has long advocated evidence-based oral health management strategies for the prevention of oral and systemic diseases. In fact, ongoing research efforts are underway examining the association between periodontal (gum) disease and heart and lung disease, diabetes, premature, low birth weight babies and many other conditions. The 2000 Surgeon General's report, *Oral Health in America*, called attention to this association and stated that, if left untreated, poor oral health is a "silent X-factor promoting the onset of life-threatening diseases which are responsible for the deaths of millions of Americans each year." As such, the ADHA believes that integrating dental hygienists into the healthcare delivery system as essential primary care providers to expand access to oral health care will help improve the public's overall health.

This is why proper [dental hygiene diagnosis](#) is critical in identifying and treating early risk factors for more serious health concerns. Over the past two decades, we have collaborated with New York Center for Health Workforce Studies (CHWS) and School of Public Health at the State University of New York-Albany (SUNY) to update the Dental Hygiene Professional Index (DHPPPI). In her [Health Affairs article](#), Margaret Langelier and her SUNY coauthors examined the increase of dental hygienists' scope of practice between 2001 and 2014 and found a positive correlation between a state's more autonomous scope of practice and the oral health of that state's adult population. Far too often scope of practice limitations impede the ability of dental hygienists to provide the full spectrum of services they are educated to deliver. By reducing supervisory requirements for dental hygienists, it is ADHA's hope that the gap between dental and medical care narrows for the benefit of our patients.

ADHA advocates the inclusion of dental hygienists in the development of federal, state and local policies that support improved oral health and wellness. As such, we are committed to

collaborative partnerships and coalitions with other organizations that improve access to care for our most vulnerable populations.

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