

HOW CAN A DENTAL HYGIENIST IMPROVE ACCESS AND PRODUCTIVITY IN YOUR COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER (CHC)?

Wondering how to meet the challenge of providing more oral health care for your patients? Consider the unique ways a dental hygienist can help establish or increase dental services in your community health center. Under the Affordable Care Act, more children and adults than ever before will be entitled to dental benefits.

What Can a Dental Hygienist Do? -

Dental hygienists are primary care oral health professionals who administer a range of oral health services. The range of services dental hygienists offer includes:

- **prophylaxis**
- **periodontal scaling & root planing/periodontal maintenance**
- **tobacco cessation counseling**
- **local anesthetic administration**
- **supportive restorative services (i.e. placing & removing temporary fillings)**
- **oral health education**
- **assessments/screenings**
- **radiographs (x-rays)**
- **sealants**
- **fluoride treatments**
- **nutritional counseling**
- **nitrous oxide administration**

Although hygienists administer care according to state practice acts, in most states hygienists can deliver services without the presence of a dentist in at least one setting.

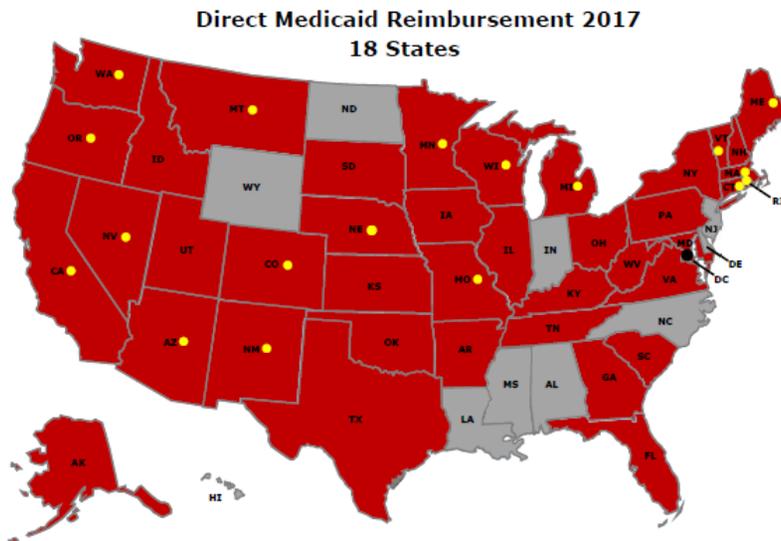
Dental Hygienists: Educated and Licensed Providers -

Dental hygienists are licensed, preventive oral health professionals who have graduated from accredited dental hygiene programs in institutions of higher education. They provide educational, clinical, research, administrative, and therapeutic services supporting total health through the promotion of optimal oral health. Dental hygienists must graduate from an accredited dental hygiene education program (typically three academic years in length or more) and pass national written and regional clinical examinations prior to obtaining a license. Additionally, dental hygienists must take continuing education courses in order to renew their license. This ensures a working professional that is current with the latest technologies, regulations and delivery of patient care.



A Dental Hygienist in a Community Health Center Can -

- **Perform community outreach.** By providing screenings and oral health education in community settings, dental hygienists can bring new patients into the oral health care system.
- **Collaborate with medical and dental professionals.** Research has identified periodontal (gum) disease as a risk factor for; heart and lung disease, diabetes, premature, and low birth weight babies. The signs and symptoms of many potentially life-threatening diseases may appear in the mouth first. Dental hygienists routinely screen for these signs and symptoms during regular oral health examinations and explain their observations to patients, encouraging them to follow up with a visit to their health care provider for a definitive diagnosis.
- **Put patients in the pipeline to see a dentist.** Dental hygienists are an additional entry point into the dental delivery care system, putting patients into the pipeline for any necessary treatment by a dentist. In 40 states, dental hygienists can initiate patient care in specified communities without a dentist present or having previously examined the patient. In 18 states, hygienists can bill Medicaid directly for care administered.
- **Increase access and productivity.** Some CHCs have reported dental appointments booked 10-12 weeks in advance and are unable to accept new patients. A dental hygienist can improve productivity by providing clinical services directly to patients, allowing the dentist to focus on restorative care and more complex procedures.



- **Direct Access States** where dental hygienists can initiate patient care in at least one setting outside of the private dental office, without the presence of a dentist, dentist referral, or prior dental exam
- States where dental hygienists can receive **Direct Reimbursement by Medicaid**

Information brought to you by:



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ADHA's **Career Center** hosts career opportunities for dental hygienists in CHCs and other sites at:
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