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American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) Applauds Passage of Dental Therapy in Michigan

CHICAGO (December 19, 2018) – The Michigan Legislature has authorized the creation of dental therapists. Dental therapists will provide preventive and specific restorative services, with a focus on those who do not have access to oral health care. ADHA partnered with the Michigan Dental Hygienists' Association (MDHA) as a part of a coalition effort to advocate for passage of SB 541 to expand oral health care access in Michigan. Dental hygienists are the prevention experts, and this creates further opportunities for dental hygienists and the public they serve.

“Bringing dental therapy to Michigan would not be possible if not for the support of our coalition of partners and our state lawmakers who had the vision for improving oral health care,” said MDHA president, Becky Domagalski, RDH, BSDH. “Dental hygienists are committed to improving oral health, and MDHA and ADHA are working hard to increase and improve the public’s oral and overall health.”

There is significant need for preventive and restorative healthcare in Michigan. According to the Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health:

- One in four third-graders had untreated dental disease.
- Dental care provided to children in an operating room visit to address preventable conditions cost \$7.9 million in 2011.
- More than one-third of all Michigan seniors have lost six or more natural teeth due to dental caries or periodontal disease.
- Due to workforce and regulatory challenges, seniors, pregnant women and children from low-income communities often are underserved and have unmet oral health care needs.

SB 541 provides a common-sense and cost-effective solution to oral health needs in Michigan. The bill allows graduates of an accredited dental therapy education program who have completed 500 hours of clinical practice, supervised by a dentist, to provide preventive and specific restorative dental services to patients. The legislation was designed to have dental therapists practice in the areas of greatest need like safety net clinics and dental shortage areas. Dental therapists will work under supervision of a dentist and through a written practice agreement.

“I applaud Michigan for taking this important step to improve access to oral health care,” said ADHA president, Michele Braerman, RDH, BSDH. “The passage of the dental therapy bill in Michigan presents another career opportunity for dental hygienists to expand their services to communities who need them the most.” Minnesota was the first state in the country to pass dental therapy legislation in 2009. Today, dental therapy has been enacted into law in Maine, Vermont, Arizona, Washington (exclusive to Tribal Lands) and now Michigan. A dental therapy pilot project is also underway in Oregon.

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About the American Dental Hygienists' Association:

The American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) is the largest national organization representing the professional interests of more than 185,000 dental hygienists across the country. Dental hygienists are preventive oral health professionals, licensed in dental hygiene, who provide educational, clinical and therapeutic services that support total health through the promotion of optimal oral health. For more information about ADHA, dental hygiene or the link between oral health and general health, visit ADHA at www.adha.org.