



## BADGER INSTITUTE

POLICY PRIORITIES

**20%**

of Wisconsin  
residents

— more than 1.2 million people —

live in a  
dental health  
professional  
shortage area



Of Minnesota dentists...

**80%**

originally opposed  
dental therapy

Today,

**60%-70%**

support it



### Dental therapists

are mid-level providers,  
similar to nurse practitioners  
or physician assistants



# Dental Therapy

Wisconsin has a dental access problem, particularly for children on Medicaid, rural residents, people with disabilities and lower-income populations. Twenty percent of the state's residents — more than 1.2 million people — live in an area that has a shortage of dental health professionals. Only 40% of children on Medicaid received preventative dental services in 2019, and only one-third of Wisconsin dentists accept Medicaid patients at all.

Poor dental care often leads to subsequent health problems, especially among children. Students with poor dental health are more likely to have a low grade-point average. Early childhood cavities may hurt participation and performance in prekindergarten education programs, which have been shown to have substantial long-term economic returns for disadvantaged children.

Thankfully, there is a solution. Allowing for dental therapists — mid-level providers similar to physician assistants or nurse practitioners — would go a long way toward addressing Wisconsin's dental provider shortage without burdening taxpayers.

Dental therapists perform preventative and restorative procedures such as simple extractions and fillings, freeing up dentists to perform more complex procedures that generate higher revenue such as crowns and bridges.

Dental therapists serve under collaborative management agreements with dentists and often practice in underserved or rural areas. Research from Pew Charitable Trusts that examined dental therapy programs in Minnesota and Canada indicates that more underserved patients receive care through the practice of dental therapy, and, at the same time, dental practices continue to generate profits.

Dental therapists are now authorized to practice in 12 states, including neighboring Minnesota, and, more recently, Michigan. Many other states are actively exploring authorizing dental therapy.

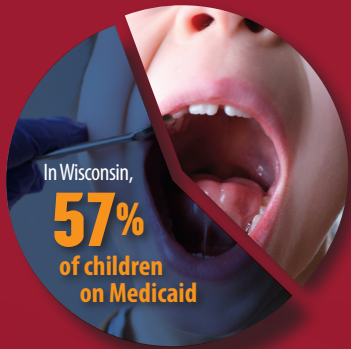
New data from Minnesota, the first state in the nation to authorize dental therapy statewide in 2009, shows that adding dental therapists to a →

***“Now we don’t have enough dental therapists for the dentists who want to hire them. Dentists are always asking us why we can’t produce more.”***



— **Karl Self**, a dentist and dental educator who directs the dental therapy program at the University of Minnesota

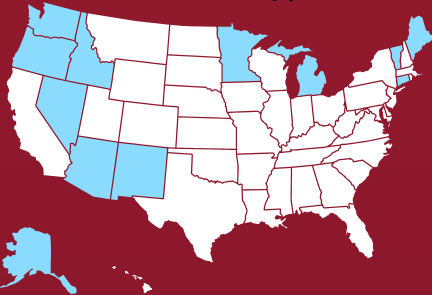
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— more than 300,000  
young children & adolescents —  
**did not receive any dental care in 2019**

**113**  
**dental therapists**  
currently practice  
in Minnesota

**12 states have authorized  
dental therapy**



Alaska, Arizona, Connecticut, Idaho, Maine,  
Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico,  
Oregon, Vermont and Washington

dental practice increases the number of daily patient visits, the daily gross revenue and the number of daily procedures. In 2016, Minnesota dental therapists provided care in nearly 100,000 patient visits, which undoubtedly has increased since then as the number of practicing dental therapists has grown, now to 113.

When Minnesota first passed legislation allowing dental therapists, 80% of dentists did not support it, according to a dentist and dental educator who directs the dental therapy program at the University of Minnesota. Now, 60% to 70% of dentists support the change, and demand is so high that many dental therapists secure jobs before graduating.

While some argue that increased Medicaid payments would address Wisconsin's dental care access problem, the success of Minnesota's dental therapy program shows that a better, free-market option exists.

A bipartisan proposal to allow for dental therapy in Wisconsin would require dental therapists to practice in a health provider shortage area or in an area made up of at least 50% of underserved populations such as those on Medicaid, patients in long-term care facilities, veterans or the uninsured.

In addition, dental therapists would be required to graduate from an accredited program through the Commission on Dental Accreditation or the respective dental boards in Wisconsin or Minnesota and would practice for 2,000 hours under the direct supervision of a dentist before moving to general supervision.

The proposal is supported by a diverse 50-member coalition, including AARP, Delta Dental of Wisconsin, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Hospital Association, Wisconsin Dental Hygienists' Association, Disability Rights Wisconsin and others.

The Badger Institute has written numerous articles about the success of Minnesota's dental therapy program — including how many dentists there support the program now — as well as how Wisconsinites would benefit from the practice. More information is available at [\*\*badgerinstitute.org/Initiatives/Dental-Therapy.htm\*\*](http://badgerinstitute.org/Initiatives/Dental-Therapy.htm).



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