



Canadian Association of Public Health Dentistry  
Association canadienne de la santé dentaire publique

## **Position Statement on Dental Therapy in Canada, September 2019**

The Canadian Association of Public Health Dentistry (CAPHD) is the national organization dedicated to promoting oral health equity and improving the oral health of all Canadians. There is an identifiable gap in access to oral health care for underserved and in-need populations. Dental therapists are trained to conduct comprehensive oral health assessments, to provide health education, and to provide preventive, restorative, and emergency dental care. Global evidence suggests that dental therapists increase access to care, most notably for children. The CAPHD recognizes dental therapists as an essential and integral part of the oral health workforce focused on reducing oral health disparities in remote, rural or otherwise underserved communities. The CAPHD supports dental therapists working collaboratively with dentists, dental hygienists, and other oral health and health care providers to promote a high standard of accessible care. Therefore, the CAPHD supports the re-establishment of dental therapy educational programs in Canada to enhance the capacity of the oral health workforce. The CAPHD is committed to partnering with stakeholders, Indigenous groups, decision-makers, and all levels of government to meet this objective.

*Position statement approved at September 21, 2019 Annual General Meeting.*

### **BACKGROUND**

- Oral health is an integral part of overall health and impacts daily functioning and activities. Oral diseases can be painful, disrupt eating and sleeping, and negatively affect growth and development.<sup>1</sup>
- There is a significant economic burden associated with poor oral health. In Canada, treatment for preventable dental caries is the leading cause of day surgery for children 0-5 years old.<sup>2</sup> Physician and emergency department visits for non-traumatic dental conditions have increased across select provinces.<sup>3-6</sup>
- Oral diseases are known to particularly affect underserved and in-need Canadians who face multiple barriers to dental care.<sup>7</sup> This burden will continue to increase as Canadians confront a shortage of dentists and other oral health professionals practising in remote, rural, and other underserved areas. In turn, severe inequities in oral health and access to care will persist in Canada.<sup>7</sup>
- In 1972, the federal government partnered with the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Toronto to establish the National School of Dental Therapy (NSDT) in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories. Since its inception, graduates from the NSDT have provided care to Indigenous and non-Indigenous children living in First Nations and Inuit communities. This federal program was subsequently relocated to Prince Albert, Saskatchewan in 1983, and was terminated in 2011.<sup>8,9</sup>
- From 1972 to 1987, the Saskatchewan provincial government developed and operated a dental therapist training program at the Wascana Institute of Applied Arts and Sciences that provided dental care for all children through school-based clinics; these services were provided under the Saskatchewan Health Dental Plan. The program was terminated in 1987.<sup>8,9</sup>
- Dental therapists are trained to conduct comprehensive oral health assessments and provide preventive, restorative, and emergency dental care.<sup>8</sup>
- Dental therapists can practise in eight provinces (not including Ontario and Quebec) and three territories at different capacities with different licensure and supervision requirements.<sup>10</sup>
- The closure of dental therapy training programs has resulted in a diminished workforce in underserved areas, with no more than 300 dental therapists currently practising in Canada.<sup>11</sup>

## SUPPORTING LITERATURE

- Peer-reviewed evidence recognizes the acceptance and effectiveness of dental therapists in improving access and providing comprehensive oral health care for children from underserved communities.<sup>12-18</sup>
- Countries that have successfully utilised dental therapists with both high and low dentist to population ratios include New Zealand,<sup>12,19-21</sup> Australia,<sup>22-27</sup> Great Britain,<sup>28,29</sup> the United States,<sup>13,30,31</sup> the Netherlands,<sup>32,33</sup> Malaysia,<sup>34,35</sup> and Tanzania.<sup>36,37</sup>

---

## References

1. World Dental Federation. FDI's definition of oral health. Available from: <http://www.fdiworlddental.org/oral-health/fdis-definition-of-oral-health>. Accessed November 29, 2017.
2. Canadian Institute for Health Information. Treatment of Preventable Dental Cavities in Preschoolers: A Focus on Day Surgery Under General Anesthesia. Ottawa, ON: CIHI; 2013.
3. Singhal S, Quiñonez C, Manson H. Visits for Nontraumatic Dental Conditions in Ontario's Health Care System. *JDR Clinical & Translational Research*. 2019 Jan;4(1):86-95.
4. Singhal S, McLaren L, Quinonez C. Trends in emergency department visits for non-traumatic dental conditions in Ontario from 2006 to 2014.
5. Figueiredo R, Rattai J, Fournier K, Levin L. Emergency department visits for dental problems associated with trauma in Alberta: A report between the years 2011 and 2017. *Dental Traumatology*. 2018 Dec;34(6):421-8.
6. Brondani M, Ahmad SH. The 1% of emergency room visits for non-traumatic dental conditions in British Columbia: Misconceptions about the numbers. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*. 2017 May 1;108(3):e279-81.
7. Leake J. Why do we need an oral health care policy in Canada? *J Can Dent Assoc* 2006; 72(4): 317.
8. Saskatchewan Dental Therapist Association. History of dental therapy in Saskatchewan. <http://www.sdta.ca/history.html>. Accessed November 20, 2017.
9. Mathu-Muju KR, Friedman JW, Nash DA. Saskatchewan's school-based dental program staffed by dental therapist: a retrospective case study. *J Public Health Dent* 2017; 77: 78-85.
10. Leck L, Randall GE. The rise and fall of dental therapy in Canada: a policy analysis and assessment of equity of access to oral health care for Inuit and First Nations communities. *Int J Equity Health* 2017;16: 131.
11. White A, Gray J. Personal communication, November 20, 2017.
12. Moffat SM, Coates DE, Meldrum A M. New Zealand's changing oral health workforce. A dental practitioner's guide to dual-trained dental therapists/dental hygienists. *N Z Dent J* 2009; 105: 57-61.
13. Fiset LA report on quality assessment of primary care provided by dental therapists to Alaska natives, September 30, 2005. <http://depts.washington.edu/dentexak/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/2005Fiset.pdf>. Accessed October 17, 2017
14. Keenan GW. The Saskatchewan dental nurse. *J Can Dent Assoc* 1975; 41: 344-345.
15. Friedman JW, Mathu-Muju KR. Dental therapists: Improving access to oral health care for underserved children. *Am J Public Health*. 2014 June; 104(6): 1005-1009.
16. Nash DA, Friedman JW, Kardos TB, Kardos RL, Schwarz E, Satur J, Berg D, Nasruddin J, Mumghamba EG, Davenport ES, Nagel R. Dental therapists: a global perspective. *Int Dent J* 2008; 58: 61-70.
17. Nash DA, Mathu-Muju KR, Friedman JW. The dental therapist movement in the United States: A critique of current trends. *J Public Health Dent* 2017. DOI: 10.1111/jphd.1225
18. Lewis MH. Dental care delivery in Saskatchewan, Canada. In: Ingle, JI, Blair P, editors. *International dental care delivery systems*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company; 1975.
19. Brooking TWH. A history of dentistry in New Zealand. Dunedin, New Zealand: New Zealand Dental Association, 1980.
20. Coates DE, Kardos TB, Moffat SM, Kardos RL. Dental therapists and dental hygienists educated for the New Zealand environment. *J Dent Educ* 2009; 73: 1001-1008.
21. Moffat SM, Foster Page LA and Thomson WM, 2017. New Zealand's School Dental Service over the Decades: Its Response to Social, Political, and Economic Influences, and the Effect on Oral Health Inequalities. *Front Public Health* 2017; 5: 177.
22. Calache H and Hopcraft MS. Evaluation of a pilot bridging program to enable Australian dental therapists to treat adult patients. *Journal of Dental Education* 2011; 75(9): 1208-17
23. Hopcraft M, Martin-Kerry JM and Calache H. Dental therapists' expanded scope of practice in Australia: a 12-month follow-up of an educational bridging program to facilitate the provision of oral health care to patients 26+ years. *Journal of Public Health Dentistry* 2015; 75(3): 234-44.
24. Nguyen TM, Tonmukayakul U and Calache H. A dental workforce strategy to make Australian public dental services more efficient. *Human resources for health* 2019; 17(1): 37.
25. Roder DM. The effect of treatment planning and referral by school dental therapists. *Austral Dent J* 1973; 18: 311-319.
26. Satur J. The development of the dental therapy profession. Available from: [www.adta.net.au/History%20ADTA.pdf](http://www.adta.net.au/History%20ADTA.pdf). Accessed October 17, 2017.
27. Schwarz E. Access to dental care - an Australian perspective. *Comm Dent Oral Epidemiol* 2006; 34: 225-231.
28. Education and Training of Personal Auxiliary to Dentistry. The Nuffield Foundation, 1993.
29. British Association of Dental Therapists website: [www.badt.org.uk](http://www.badt.org.uk). Accessed October 17, 2017.
30. Nash DA, Nagel RJ. A brief history and current status of a dental therapy initiative in the United States. *J Dent Educ* 2005; 69: 857-859.
31. Shoffstall-Cone S and Williard M. Alaska Dental Health Aide Program. *Int J Circumpolar Health* 2013; 72: 21198
32. Ministerie van VWS [Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (HWS)]. Capacity oral health care: Recommendations for short and long term policy. August 2000, The Hague, The Netherlands.
33. Innovation in Dental Care: Recommendations, Secretariat of the Innovation in Dental Care Committee, the Institute for Research on Public Expenditure (IOO), Leiden, The Netherlands, February, 2006.
34. Ministry of Health. Through the dental mirror-history of dentistry in Malaysia, 2nd edition. Kuala Lumpur: Oral Health Division, Ministry of Health, Malaysia, 2003.
35. Berman DS. Utilization of dental auxiliary - school dental nurse. *Int Dent J* 1969; 19: 24-40.
36. Poulsen S, Fubusa F, Gember PM et al. Distribution of dental therapist and assistant dental officers trained under the Tanzania-Danida dental health programme 1981-1993. *Odontostomatol Trop* 1999; 22: 19-22.
37. The United Republic of Tanzania, Ministry of Health. Policy guidelines for oral health care in Tanzania. Central Oral Health Unit, Ministry of Health, Dar-es-Salaam; 2002.