

# **Support Senate Bill 2561 - Illinois Dental Hygienists' Association Addressing Health Disparities Among Nursing Home Residents**

**Sponsored by: Senator Melinda Bush**

## **A Health Crisis Among Illinois Seniors:**

Poor oral health among nursing home residents can lead to pain, infection, malnutrition, and other serious illness. One of the greatest barriers to good oral health is simply ensuring daily oral hygiene. Most nursing home residents are unable to brush their own teeth or dentures and the nursing home staff may lack the training to properly assist with this care. Lack of transportation, age-related memory loss, other cognitive problems, and physical disabilities may also lead to missed dental appointments which can add to poor dental health for seniors.

## **Barriers to Good Oral Health:**

Shortage of dentists in non-urban areas, low numbers of dentists accepting Medicaid reimbursement, and most significantly, the current law requiring individuals have a mandated dental exam first, instead of the option of receiving an exam after the preventive services have been rendered. Many institutions, nursing homes, public health clinics, mobile units, and homebound do not have a dentist available to provide the dental exam prior to the opportunity of receiving routine preventive care.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, oral health problems in older adults include the following:

- Untreated tooth decay- 96% of adults aged 65 or older has had a cavity and, 1 in 5 have untreated tooth decay
- Gum disease- 68% of adults aged 65 or older have gum disease
- Tooth loss- Having missing teeth or wearing dentures can affect nutrition because people without teeth or with dentures often prefer soft, easily chewed foods instead of foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables
- Chronic disease- Most elders take prescription medications; these drugs can cause dry mouth which leads to reduced saliva flow and increases the risk of cavities

## **Public Health Dental Hygienists are Part of the Solution!**

The dental practice act allows a Public Health Dental Hygienist (PHDH) to practice if:

- They hold a valid license to practice in the State
- Have 2 years of full-time clinical experience or an equivalent of 4,000 hours
- Have completed 42 clock hours of additional courses in dental education in advanced areas specific to public health dentistry
- Collaborates with a dentist and has a written public health agreement with that dentist to provide access to preventive care without the dentist examining the patient first
- Provides preventive care to those eligible for Medicaid or those who are uninsured and whose household income is not greater than 200% of the federal poverty level

**The Current Public Health Practice Settings Allowed Today:**

- Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC)
- Federal, state, or local health facility
- Head Start
- Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) facility
- Certified school-based health center or school-based oral health program

**Vote YES on SB 2561 to increase access to oral healthcare for Seniors.**

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