

## **Expanding Access to Dental Care through Dental Hygienists**

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**Introduction:** An estimated 64.7 million Americans suffer with dental conditions such as tooth decay and gum disease, diseases that is entirely preventable with adequate oral care [1, 2]. Access to preventive dental care continues to be an issue for vulnerable populations seeking care in Indiana. Currently, dental hygienists, clinicians who offer preventive dental services, are reporting significant challenges finding adequate employment. These clinicians have the potential to address some of Indiana's access to dental care issues, yet there are labor market imbalances within the profession.

**Methods:** The workforce and labor market of dental hygienists was analyzed on a national and state level. In addition, qualitative data were collected from key-informant interviews with leaders within Indiana's dental hygiene educational programs. Through the use of a non-probability survey, graduates of dental hygiene programs were questioned on employment factors and key barriers within the labor market. Indiana's oral health delivery system was analyzed for key opportunities to address access to care issues. Policy on dental hygiene scope of practice within Indiana is also presented.

**Results:** The dental hygiene labor market is experiencing market saturation. Indiana has restrictive policies on dental hygienist's scope of practice. Leaders in the profession suggest policy changes and less restrictions on the practice of dental hygiene in order to address the current access to dental care issues.

**Conclusion:** Hoosier children are experiencing preventable disease burden, while at the same time Indiana's workforce trained in dental disease prevention is experiencing market saturation. Recommendations to address labor market imbalances among dental hygienists are suggested as well as methods to promote preventive oral health care access.

### References:

1. Eke PI, Dye BA, Wei L, Thornton-Evans GO, Genco RJ. Prevalence of periodontitis in adults in the United States: 2009 and 2010. *J Dent Res* 2012;91(10):914-20.
2. Oral health in America: a report of the Surgeon General. *J Calif Dent Assoc* 2000;28(9):685-95.