

## New Study Finds Alaska Dental Therapists Provide Safe, Competent and Appropriate Care

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An [October 2010 study](#) by RTI International of Research Triangle Park, NC, found that dental therapists practicing in Alaska provide safe, competent and appropriate dental care. The two-year, intensive evaluation is the first independent evaluation of its scale to assess care provided by dental therapists practicing in the United States. It confirms what numerous prior studies of dental therapists practicing in other countries have already shown: that dental therapists provide safe care for underserved populations. A two-page summary of the evaluation is also available.

In Alaska, dental therapists have been providing preventive and basic dental care to children and families in remote Alaska Native villages since 2005. Although new to the U.S., dental therapy has been well-established for decades in more than 50 countries, including those with advanced dental care systems similar to the U.S.

The program evaluation assessed the work of dental therapists in five communities, as well as the experience of hundreds of patients and how these dental therapists performed on hundreds of procedures. They were directly observed performing sealant placement, composite and amalgam preparations, stainless steel crown placement, and oral health instruction. The evaluation relied on examination standards used for assessing clinical competency for board certification of U.S. dental school graduates. Key findings of the evaluation indicate:

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- ▶ Dental therapists are technically competent to perform the procedures within their scope of work and are doing so safely and appropriately,
- ▶ They are consistently working under the general supervision of dentists,
- ▶ They are successfully treating cavities and helping to relieve pain for people who often had to wait months or travel hours to seek treatment ,
- ▶ Patient satisfaction with their care is very high, and
- ▶ They are well-accepted in tribal villages.



Severe shortages of dentists disproportionately affecting low-income communities and communities of color and lack of affordable dental care are putting sorely needed dental services out of reach for nearly 50 million Americans, particularly those in rural and underserved areas. Across the country, states are grappling with how to expand access to dental care, and many are investigating how to use alternative dental providers, including dental therapists, as a way to expand the reach of dentists.

The program evaluation was funded by the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#), the [Rasmuson Foundation](#) and the [Bethel Community Services Foundation](#). The W.K. Kellogg Foundation is working to improve the oral health of vulnerable children and families, by building awareness of oral health access issues and bring quality dental care to every community, and expanding the dental care team to include dental therapists.

- ▶ [News Release](#)
- ▶ [RTI Evaluation Report](#)
- ▶ [RTI Evaluation Report Appendix](#)