



Alaska Primary Care
ASSOCIATION

May 7, 2019

Representative Adam Wool, Chair
House Labor & Commerce Committee
Alaska House of Representatives
Alaska Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Support for House Bill 127/Senate Bill 68 – Dental Hygienist Advance Practice Permits

Dear Committee Chair Wool and Committee Members:

The Alaska Primary Care Association (APCA) supports the operations and development of Alaska's 27 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Alaska Health Centers voted to support health workforce development initiatives that introduce new provider types to the market and increase access to care in their 2019 Policy Priorities.

All of Alaska's Community Health Centers are required to provide oral health services as a component of the comprehensive medical, dental, behavioral, pharmacy and care coordination services they offer. Dental services and overall oral health are vital components in the whole person care that Community Health Centers provide their patients. Many Health Centers offer on-site dental services provided by staff or contracted dental health professionals. Other more rural and smaller sites rely on sending patients to larger hub health facilities or neighboring urban Health Centers for dental care. One frequently cited reason for the shortage of dental services is the lack of providers.

In 2018, almost one third of Alaska Health Centers' 113,000 patients received dental care at their Community Health Center through over 96,796 visits provided by 77 full-time equivalent dentists, hygienists, and dental therapists. Persistent shortages of providers at all levels in Community Health Center dental clinics result in providers not working at their highest level of licensure; creating inefficiencies, decreased provider satisfaction, and barriers to patient care. The addition of Advanced Hygienists to practices would add an additional valuable layer of staffing between dentists and other hygienists and dental therapists to provide comprehensive services and support integration with other Health Center services, including chronic disease management, and behavioral health/substance use disorder services.

Community Health Centers have been pioneers in the past in supporting and incorporating expansion of health professional provider types into their care settings. Community Health Centers are ready to embrace this new provider type as they continue to grow and expand the increasing need of integrated dental care in primary care settings.

We urge passage of House Bill 127.

Sincerely,

Nancy Merriman
Executive Director