



Representative Ivy Spohnholz

House Ways and Means Committee Chair

House Labor & Commerce Committee Co-Chair

Serving House District 16: College Gate, Russian Jack, Nunaka Valley, & Reflection Lake

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

HB 111: Dental Hygienist Advanced Practice Permit

What is a dental hygienist?

A dental hygienist is a licensed oral health educator and clinical operator who uses preventive, educational, and therapeutic methods to help patients achieve the best oral health.

Dental hygienists typically perform oral health education and preventative care, including cleanings, (removing hard and soft deposits on the surface of the teeth), applying sealants and fluorides, and documenting patient care.¹

What are the education and training requirements for dental hygienists?

Dental hygienists in Alaska must have graduated from an academic dental hygiene program accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation of the American Dental Association. The Alaska Board of Dental Examiners requires a minimum of an associate degree, but most hygienists graduate from four-year bachelor's degree programs and some from master's degree programs. A dental hygienist must also have passed the written National Dental Examination, as well as the Western Regional Examining Board or a state or regional dental hygiene clinical examination approved by the Board. Additionally, a dental hygienist who applies for an advanced practice permit under HB 111 would have to have a minimum of 4,000 hours of documented clinical experience under the supervision of a licensed dentist.

Is there a dental hygienist program in Alaska?

Yes. The University of Alaska Anchorage has an accredited dental hygiene program. The UAA School of Allied Health has offered a bachelor's degree in dental Hygiene for almost 50 years. They have graduated more than 500 dental hygienists. The program recently transitioned from an associate level degree into a 120-credit baccalaureate degree to accommodate the expanding scope of practice in dental hygiene.

How many licensed dental hygienists' practice in Alaska?

In [FY20](#) there were 659 licensed dental hygienists. Twenty-eight of those licenses were granted in 2020. In comparison there were 815 dentists in FY20.²

¹ Anchorage, U. o. (n.d.). *Dental Hygiene*. Retrieved from School of Allied Health: <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/college-of-health/departments/school-of-allied-health/academics/dental-hygiene/>

² Alaska, S. o. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.commerce.alaska.gov/web/portals/5/pub/PL_Licensing_Stats_Annual_Report.pdf

Will this bill create competition between dentists and hygienists?

This bill is supported by the Alaska Dental Society and Alaska Board of Dental Examiners. We don't foresee any conflict between dentists and dental hygienist as dental hygienist duties are preventative and any further action needed per Section 1, page 3, line 22 through line 1 on page 4 are to be referred to a license dentist.

What is the benefit of allowing an advanced practice permit? Why do we need this?

This will allow dental hygienists who meet the necessary advanced education, experience, and licensure requirements of the permit to work independently via direct care agreement with a dentist. Dental hygienists are skilled, licensed oral health care professionals who focus on preventing and treating oral diseases. The creation of Advanced Practice Permits will also increase access to oral care for individuals who need care but are not able to visit a dental office because of illness, disability, or confinement. Additionally, it will offer new consumer choices for services and improve public education regarding dental hygiene and its connection to oral and overall health.

How much would it cost to get an advanced practice permit?

Sara Chambers, Division Director of Alaska Division of Corporation, Business, and Professional Licensing, estimates the advanced practice permit will cost \$270 per license.

Will dental hygienists with advance practice permits be required to maintain liability insurance?

Yes. In Section 2 (page 3, line 22) dental hygienists who obtain this permit are required to acquire and maintain professional liability insurance.

How much will it cost a dental hygienist to maintain liability insurance?

The Division of Insurance estimates a professional liability insurance policy with a limit of \$100,000 per claim of, with an annual collective base rate of \$300,000, is approximately \$89 per month for a dental hygienist. If liability coverage were to increase to \$1,000,000/\$3,000,000 similar to the costs for the dentist program, the premium is estimated to be \$120 per month.

What does the professional liability insurance include?

Professional liability insurance can cover malpractice legal costs, reimbursement for lost wages, HIPAA fines and penalties, licensing issues reimbursement, and more.

Will advanced practice permit-holders be able to bill Medicaid? Will this increase Medicaid costs?

Dental hygienists will have the ability to bill Medicaid for their services through HB 111. As independent workers they will be added to the list of services provided through Medicaid and will therefore be able to bill Medicaid as well. The fiscal analysis from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services says, "Possible increased costs in Medicaid benefits may exist but are considered immaterial. While adding additional providers we don't anticipate additional benefit expenditures."

Will advanced practice permit-holders work independently full-time?

According to Katrina Virgin, the immediate past President and Alaska Dental Hygienist Association Legislative chair, most advanced practice permit-holders in other states primarily work part-time in dental shortage areas or specific alternative practice settings (nursing homes, schools, federally qualified health centers, etc.) as well as continuing to work part-time in traditional private or public health dental offices.

What is a collaborative agreement?

Collaborative agreements allow qualified dental hygienists to provide some services without the direct supervision of a licensed dentist. Licensed dentists may not maintain more than five collaborative agreements with dental hygienists at a given time.

The key difference between a collaborative agreement and an advanced practice permit is that an advanced practice permit-holder is not under the supervision of a dentist, whereas a dental hygienist in a collaborative agreement works under the general supervision of a licensed dentist. Additionally, advanced practice permit-holders may only serve patients who meet one of the seven criteria outlined in Section 2(b). Otherwise, hygienists in collaborative agreements and advanced practice permit-holders both have limitations on the services they can provide, must be licensed by the State of Alaska Board of Dental Examiners, and are subject to discipline if they provide services outside their limited scope of practice.