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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 attain optimum 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 (CODA) 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 degree in Dental Hygiene for almost 50 years. They have graduated more than 500 dental hygienists. They recently transitioned their program 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 [FY21](#) there were 698 licensed dental hygienists, up from 659 in FY20. In comparison there were 875 dentists in FY21.²

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/PLannualreport_2021.pdf

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 already bill Medicaid for their services, and HB 111 does not create any new services that are not already being provided to patients. 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, President of the Alaska Dental Hygienists’ Association, 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.

How many dental hygienists would be eligible for an Advanced Practice Permit?

It is estimated that approximately five percent of dental hygienists (30-40) would be eligible and interested in an advanced practice permit.

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.

How many dental hygienists currently practice under a collaborative agreement?

It is estimated that about a dozen dental hygienists currently practice under a collaborative agreement.

What are the requirements for the 4,000 hours of documented clinical experience?

Hours of documented clinical experience are fulfilled when the dental hygienist spends time working in the clinic with patients. This includes but is not limited to disinfecting and preparing

a room for a patient, processing x-rays, providing periodontal treatment, and any other work they do for patients in the clinic working with a licensed dentist.

How is an advanced practice permit for dental hygienists similar to the licensure for an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse, (APRN)?

APRNs must first be licensed as a Registered Nurse, (RN), before their APRN license can be renewed. Similarly, as provided in HB111, licensed dental hygienists with Advanced Practice Permits cannot renew this permit without first holding an active dental hygienist license.

How is an advanced practice permit for dental hygienists similar to the licensure for a Physician's Assistant, (PA)?

Physicians Assistants can practice in a Doctor's office or semi-independently if they have a collaborative agreement with a doctor. Dental hygienists already have the ability to practice semi-independently with a direct care agreement with a dentist. HB111 would allow dental hygienists with an advanced practice permit to practice without direct supervision of a dentist if a dental hygienist has 4,000 hours of clinical experience and are approved by the Board of Dental Examiners.

How many Alaskans lack access to dental care?

Comprehensive data on this topic is not available, however, according to the Health Resources and Service Administration, there are 298 clinics in Alaska that qualify as dental shortage areas, including clinics in correctional facilities. There are 13 geographic clinics with shortages, three correctional facilities with shortages, 28 federally qualified clinics with shortages, one Medicaid eligible shortage area, and the remaining areas are Indian Health Service providers.³

How many children in Alaska lack access to dental care?

In 2017 12,785 Alaskan children lived below the poverty line. 62% of Alaskans earning less than \$20,000 a year spend more than half their income on rent. Many relying on Medicaid for health coverage.⁴ As of February 2021, 44% of Alaska Medicaid enrollees are children. Of the 240,776 enrollees in Alaska, 98,660 are 18 or younger.⁵

Does the Advanced Practice Permit as proposed in HB 111 provide for maintenance and safety requirements of the use of radiological equipment?

The regulation of maintenance and safe use of radiological equipment is not directly referenced in the legislation; however, this is currently provided by the Board of Dental Examiners under AS 08.36.075. The board is responsible for establishing and enforcing standards for dental radiological equipment, and these regulations will apply to dental hygienists holding an advanced practice permit.

³ <https://data.hrsa.gov/tools/shortage-area/hpsa-find>

⁴ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/586370cecc534a5dbdedba846/t/5c0e0535032be4548e78dd34/1544422713259/Alaska-ranks-36th.pdf>

⁵ <http://dhss.alaska.gov/healthyalaska/pages/dashboard.aspx>