

The Washington State Dental Association (WSDA) represents over 4,200 dentists from across the state. WSDA supports cost-effective, practical solutions that prevent disease and remove barriers to quality oral health for all Washingtonians.

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Expand Access to Affordable, Quality Preventive Dental Care

Support HB 2176

THE ISSUE

The serious shortage of dental hygienists in Washington is jeopardizing access to affordable, quality preventive dental care.

- For every dental hygienist seeking a position, there are more than 3-4 unfilled positions. Statewide, hygienist positions are open an average of 4.2 months before filled.
- Given a typical hygienist's schedule (10 patients per day, four days per week), each persistent opening translates into 160-200 patients not receiving care each month.
- The dental hygienist shortage is forcing patients to wait months to receive preventive services in both community health centers and private practices.

THE SOLUTION: HB 2176

This bill would:

- Create a "Preventive Dental Assistant" license that would permit licensees to provide basic preventive care under supervision of a dentist.
- Require applicants to complete additional education and demonstrate competency as determined by the Dental Quality Assurance Commission (Commission) in order to become licensed.
- Allow the Commission to undergo rulemaking to determine what duties a dentist may delegate to a dental assistant under general supervision.
- Enable the Commission to require continuing education for expanded function dental auxiliaries — a long-standing request of the Commission.

THE IMPACTS OF HB 2176

- **Expands the dental safety net in Washington:** Dental offices will have more flexibility in caring for patients with fewer scheduling difficulties. This will be especially helpful for Federally Qualified Health Centers and other public health clinics.
- **Provides another safe option for routine, preventive care:** Preventive dental assistants will provide specific, routine cleaning procedures, which will increase access to preventive care, resulting in both health and financial benefits for the patients of Washington state.
- **Increases the size and diversity of the dental professional workforce in Washington,** attracting more young people to the profession and providing more career opportunities.
- **Utilizes an existing model:** The Army National Guard, Indian Health Service, and Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium use a similar model to provide routine, preventive dental care to their communities.
- **Enhances the value of dental hygienists:** By allowing other trained professional staff to perform less-complex procedures, hygienists will have more time to focus on more complex, direct patient care that requires their advanced training.

