

# S. 20

# Dental Therapists



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# Access to Dental Care



- In 2015, the HCA's consumer helpline opened over 100 cases related to problems accessing dental care:
  - Clients from every county
  - Approximately half were Medicaid beneficiaries
- Visits to the dental services page on the Vermont Law Help website increased nearly 500% from 2014 to 2015.
- Vermont has a major shortage of dentists who accept Medicaid.
- Many of our clients cannot access dental care because no dentist will see them.
- There is no incentive for dentists to accept additional Medicaid patients.



# Client Stories



- Ms. C's 13-year-old son had a cleaning scheduled at his dental office. When the family arrived for the appointment, the office refused to see the child because his insurance had switched from a private plan to Medicaid. Although the office does accept Medicaid, they were not accepting new Medicaid patients. Ms. C's children would be considered new Medicaid patients because of the family's change in insurance coverage.



# Client Stories



- Mr. D called the HCA after calling all 31 dentists in the Rutland area listed as accepting new Medicaid patients in the Medicaid provider portal. He was unable to find one that would see him. Mr. D ended up having a painful tooth extracted during emergency hours at the community health center. He was still unable to find a regular dentist.



# Client Stories



- Mr. A transitioned from commercial insurance to Medicaid. Mr. A's dentist then refused to treat him, even though the dentist is a Medicaid provider, because the dentist has a quota of Medicaid patients that has already been reached.
- Ms. B needed to see a dentist before she could have a surgical procedure done. She called a number of the offices listed as taking new Medicaid patients, and was unable to find a dentist that was in fact accepting new Medicaid patients.



# Licensed Dental Practitioners



- Dental Therapists would give Vermont's dental offices an economically viable option for treating additional patients who have Medicaid coverage
  - Offices that choose to employ Dental Therapists will be able to care for more patients and provide services in more settings
  - Dental Therapists will cost less to employ than dentists
  - Dentists will be able to use more of their time for complex procedures

**Bottom line:** Better access to oral health care for Vermonters

