

Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office

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FISCAL NOTE

Date: 3/30/2016

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S.20 – An act relating to establishing and regulating dental therapists

The bill proposes to establish and regulate licensed dental therapists with the purpose of increasing access to and utilization of dental services. A program to train dental therapists in Vermont does not currently exist and it will take Vermont Technical College (VTC) at least one to two years to get through the accreditation process and begin the program. Candidates will then need three semesters of training on top of their dental hygiene training.

As such, there should be no fiscal impact to the state budget before SFY'19 since it is anticipated that no dental therapists will be in the community before then. After SFY'19 the Department of Vermont Health Access (DVHA) estimates that utilization could increase DVHA spending by \$120,000 to \$175,000 (gross) in the first year (2019 or 2020) depending on how quickly dental therapists are hired by dental practices and/or Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Utilization will likely increase in the out-years to the extent the program is more fully rolled-out.

Other states:

While other states have considered the use of dental therapists, Minnesota (MN) appears to be the only state that has actually implemented and rolled out the program. While preliminary findings suggest that a majority of the new patients served by dental therapists were enrolled in public programs, at this time Minnesota doesn't yet have valid data on Medicaid spending on dental therapists due to variety of billing and coding challenges.^{1, 2}

Other considerations:

Secretary of State's Office: According to the Secretary of State's (SOS) office, setting up a new credential will require significant staff time but will be done within their existing budget resources.

Program Start-Up costs: The Vermont Technical College will have to hire a director (who has to be a dentist) and purchase equipment.

Emergency room off-sets: In a handout from DVHA provided during testimony to the Human Services Committee, DVHA claims that it "does not anticipate that the addition of license dental therapists as Medicaid providers will result in substantial cost offsets in emergency room visits for dental."³

¹ Early Impacts of Dental Therapists in Minnesota, February 2014.

<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/dt/dtlegisrpt.pdf>

² Correspondences with Mark Schoenbaum, Director of Rural Health and Primary Care, Minnesota Department of Health. 3/30/16

³ DVHA Testimony to House Committee on Human Services, 3/23/2016.

<http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2016/WorkGroups/House%20Human%20Services/Bills/S.20/Testimony/S.20~Aaron%20French~Written%20Testimony~3-23-2016.pdf>