



WHAT IS AN RDHAP?

Registered Dental Hygienist in Alternative Practice (RDHAP)

California has, along with an ever growing number of other states, a licensure category of dental hygienist that has direct access to defined types of populations, primarily the most vulnerable and underserved. This dental hygienist is called a Registered Dental Hygienist in Alternative Practice (RDHAP). These health providers are well educated and trained to initiate preventive and therapeutic oral hygiene treatment based on their assessment of the individuals needs without the specific authorization or presence of a dentist.

The RDHAP is the independent hygienist in California.

- Established in 1998 (AB 560, Perata, Ch. 753), RDHAPs are Registered Dental Hygienists who receive specialized education and training to provide dental hygiene care to elderly and disabled populations independently outside the traditional dental office in order to reach underserved populations who were going without oral healthcare.
- Specifically, to become an RDHAP, one must first become a Registered Dental Hygienist and obtain a bachelor's degree. Then, after practicing for 2000 hours as a Registered Dental Hygienist in a dental office or in public health, return to

school to receive an additional 150 hours of education and training to work with special needs patients independently and outside the traditional dental office.

- RDHAPs are not supervised by a dentist. Under current law, RDHAPs independently provide any general supervision dental hygiene treatment that a Registered Dental Hygienist can provide. Over 700 licenses have been issued; and over 90% are women owned businesses.
- Many Californians have difficulty accessing care through a traditional dental office due to a lack of dentists in their communities or due to the patient's physical or cognitive limitations. This requires care to be delivered differently in order to meet the needs of the patient.
- RDHAPs provide dental hygiene care to the elderly and poor, patients in **nursing facilities**, the **homebound** disabled or homebound elderly, and patients in **schools** or those living in **Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas (DHPSAs)**. RDHAPs can have offices, use portable equipment or have mobile vans.
- RDHAPs are recognized dental providers and have a Medicare National Provider Identification (NPI) number. Denti-Cal recognizes RDHAPs as billable providers.

A Quick History

- An Office of Statewide Health Planning & Development (OSHPD) study, conducted by the CSU Northridge and UCLA, was the precipitating factor in creating the RDHAP as a way to reach the underserved. The California Dental Association (CDA) attempted to stop the study through litigation, but the study was resumed. The OSHPD workforce study provided the data and a basis for the legislature to create the RDHAP provider category.
- Stakeholders worked with then Assemblymembers Herschel Rosenthal and Rusty Areias before Assemblymember Don Perata placed RDHAPs in law. Assembly Bill 560 passed in 1998 establishing the RDHAP as an independent provider of dental hygiene care.
- CSU Northridge and UCLA opined in the OSHPD report that the dental hygiene care provided by RDHAPs was as good as provided in a dental office. ***There have***



been no healthcare complaints levied against RDHAPS. For 20 years RDAHPS have safely provided dental hygiene care to their patients, who without it would not receive any dental care.

- ***In fact***, the law originally required the patient to obtain a prescription for dental hygiene care from a physician or a dentist *prior* to seeing the RDHAP.
- However, after years of success with the RDHAP practice, the prescription requirement was shown to simply delay care rather than provide any patient protection. The legislature changed the prescription requirement to instead require the patient to obtain a prescription for further dental hygiene care eighteen months *after* first being treated by a RDHAP. That requirement remains in place today.
- There is a severe lack of dentists willing to treat these special needs patients and even fewer dentists who take Denti-Cal. RDHAPs spend a great deal of time searching for dentists willing to treat their patients who may need more care.

Independent Practice Hygienists in Other States:

The services are generally provided in settings such as Head Start centers, schools, federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), and long-term care facilities. Washington and Colorado were the first states to allow this. **In 1984, Washington began to allow unsupervised practice in alternative settings.**

In **1987, Colorado** began to allow dental hygienists to practice dental hygiene services without a dentist's authorization or supervision.

Other states have followed suit since. **Oregon** first allowed dental hygienists to deliver services in limited access settings in 1997. In 2011, Oregon modified this law, adding the requirement that insurance reimburse extended practice dental hygienists.

In **16 states**, there is statutory or regulatory language allowing the state **Medicaid program to directly reimburse** dental hygienists for services rendered.

(CA Health Benefit Review Program Report, 2015)

