

**RCW 18.265.005 Finding—Intent.** The legislature finds that good oral health is an integral piece of overall health and well-being. Without treatment, dental disease compromises overall health and requires increasingly costly interventions. However, most dental disease can be prevented at little cost through routine dental care and disease prevention.

Dental-related issues are a leading reason that Washingtonians seek care in hospital emergency departments, which has become the source of care for many, especially uninsured and low-income populations.

It is the intent of the legislature to expand access to oral health care for all Washingtonians through an evidence-based mid-level dental provider called a dental therapist. Dental therapy is a strategy to address racial and ethnic disparities in health and rural health care access gaps. Dental therapists are also a strategy to increase workforce diversity in health care and expand career opportunities for existing members of the dental care workforce such as dental hygienists.

It is the legislature's intent that dental therapists will meet the needs of local communities as they work under the direction of a dentist licensed in accordance with state or federal law. The legislature intends for dental therapists to be incorporated into the dental care workforce and used to effectively treat more patients.

It is the intent of the legislature to follow the national commission on dental accreditation's standards for dental therapy education. This will ensure that dental therapists are trained to the highest quality standards and provide state-to-state consistency. It is the intent of the legislature that incorporating the commission on dental accreditation's standards for dental therapy education will pave the way for Washington education institutions to become accredited programs and for students to qualify for financial aid.

It is also the intent of the legislature to provide an efficient and reasonable pathway, through a limited license, for federally certified dental health aide therapists or tribally licensed dental therapists to become a Washington state licensed dental therapist. [2023 c 460 s 1.]

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** "Sections 1 through 22 of this act take effect January 1, 2024." [2023 c 460 s 25.]