

**Chapter 18.265 RCW  
DENTAL THERAPISTS**

**Sections**

18.265.005	Finding—Intent.
18.265.010	Definitions.
18.265.020	License required—Liability insurance.
18.265.030	Licensing requirements.
18.265.040	Licensure without examination—Licensed in another state.
18.265.050	Scope of practice.
18.265.060	Supervising dentist—Practice plan contract— Requirements.
18.265.070	Exclusions from chapter.
18.265.080	Practice limited to federally qualified health centers and look-alikes.
18.265.090	Limited license.
18.265.100	Application of uniform disciplinary act.
18.265.800	Rule making—Department of health—2023 c 460.

**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.]

**RCW 18.265.010 Definitions.** The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Close supervision of a dentist" means that a supervising dentist:

(a) Has personally examined and diagnosed the patient and has personally authorized the procedures to be performed;

(b) Is continuously on-site while the procedure in question is being performed; and

(c) Is capable of responding immediately in the event of an emergency.

(2) "Commission" means the dental quality assurance commission established in chapter 18.32 RCW.

(3) "Dental therapist" means a person licensed to practice dental therapy under this chapter.

(4) "Dental therapy" means the services and procedures specified in RCW 18.265.050.

(5) "Dentist" means a person licensed to practice dentistry under chapter 18.32 RCW or exempt from such licensure pursuant to Title 25 U.S.C. Sec. 1621t of the Indian health care improvement act.

(6) "Denturist" means a person licensed to engage in the practice of denturism under chapter 18.30 RCW.

(7) "Department" means the department of health.

(8) "Off-site supervision" means supervision that does not require the dentist to be personally on-site when services are provided or to previously examine or diagnose the patient.

(9) "Practice plan contract" means a document that is signed by a dentist and a dental therapist and outlines the functions the dentist authorizes the dental therapist to perform and the level and type of dentist supervision that is required.

(10) "Secretary" means the secretary of health. [2023 c 460 s 2.]

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** See note following RCW 18.265.005.

**RCW 18.265.020 License required—Liability insurance.** No person may practice dental therapy or represent himself or herself as a dental therapist without being licensed by the department under this chapter. Every person licensed to practice dental therapy in this state shall renew their license and comply with administrative procedures, administrative requirements, continuing education requirements, and fees provided in RCW 43.70.250 and 43.70.280. The licensing fees for dental therapists may not be subsidized by other health professions. The department shall establish by rule mandatory continuing education requirements to be met by dental therapists applying for license renewal. A dental therapist must obtain liability insurance with coverage equivalent to that of the supervising dentist's liability insurance coverage. [2023 c 460 s 3.]

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** See note following RCW 18.265.005.

**RCW 18.265.030 Licensing requirements.** (1) The department shall issue a license to practice as a dental therapist to any applicant who:

(a) Pays any applicable fees established by the secretary under RCW 43.70.110 and 43.70.250;

(b) Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, successfully completes a dental therapist program that is accredited or has received initial accreditation by the American dental association's commission on dental accreditation;

(c) Passes an examination approved by the commission; and

(d) Submits, on forms provided by the secretary, the applicant's name, address, and other applicable information as determined by the secretary.

(2) Applicants who successfully completed a dental therapist program before September 30, 2022, that was not accredited by the American dental association's commission on dental accreditation but that the commission determines is substantially equivalent to an accredited education program meet the criteria described in subsection (1)(b) of this section if the applicant also, has proof of at least 400 preceptorship hours under the close supervision of a dentist.

(3) When considering and approving the exam under subsection (1)(c) of this section, the committee must consult with tribes that license dental health aide therapists and with dental therapy education programs located in this state.

(4) The secretary in consultation with the commission must establish by rule the procedures to implement this section. [2023 c 460 s 4.]

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** See note following RCW 18.265.005.

**RCW 18.265.040 Licensure without examination—Licensed in another state.** An applicant holding a valid license and currently engaged in practice in another state may be granted a license without examination required by this chapter, on the payment of any required fees, if the secretary determines that the other state's licensing standards are substantively equivalent to the standards in this state: PROVIDED, That the secretary may require the applicant to: (1) File with the secretary documentation certifying the applicant is licensed to practice in another state; and (2) provide information as the secretary deems necessary pertaining to the conditions and criteria of the uniform disciplinary act, chapter 18.130 RCW, and to demonstrate to the secretary a knowledge of Washington law pertaining to the practice of dental therapy. [2023 c 460 s 5.]

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** See note following RCW 18.265.005.

**RCW 18.265.050 Scope of practice.** (1) Subject to the limitations in this section, a licensed dental therapist may provide

the following services and procedures under the supervision of a licensed dentist as provided under RCW 18.265.060 and to the extent the supervising dentist authorizes the service or procedure to be provided by the dental therapist:

- (a) Oral health instruction and disease prevention education, including nutritional counseling and dietary analysis;
- (b) Comprehensive charting of the oral cavity;
- (c) Making radiographs;
- (d) Mechanical polishing;
- (e) Prophylaxis;
- (f) Periodontal scaling and root planing;
- (g) Application of topical preventative or prophylactic agents, including fluoride and pit and fissure sealants;
- (h) Pulp vitality testing;
- (i) Application of desensitizing medication or resin;
- (j) Fabrication of athletic mouth guards;
- (k) Placement of temporary restorations;
- (l) Fabrication of soft occlusal guards;
- (m) Tissue conditioning and soft reline;
- (n) Atraumatic restorative therapy and interim restorative therapy;
- (o) Dressing changes;
- (p) Administration of local anesthetic;
- (q) Administration of nitrous oxide;
- (r) Emergency palliative treatment of dental pain limited to the procedures in this section;
- (s) The placement and removal of space maintainers;
- (t) Cavity preparation;
- (u) Restoration of primary and permanent teeth;
- (v) Placement of temporary crowns;
- (w) Preparation and placement of preformed crowns for patients 18 years of age or older;
- (x) Indirect and direct pulp capping on primary and permanent teeth;
- (y) Stabilization of reimplanted teeth;
- (z) Extractions of primary teeth;
- (aa) Suture removal;
- (bb) Brush biopsies;
- (cc) Minor adjustments and repairs on removable prostheses;
- (dd) Recementing of permanent crowns;
- (ee) Oral evaluation and assessment of dental disease and the formulation of an individualized treatment plan. When possible, a dental therapist must collaborate with the supervising dentist to formulate a patient's individualized treatment plan;
- (ff) Identification of oral and systemic conditions requiring evaluation and treatment by a dentist, physician, or other health care provider, and management of referrals;
- (gg) The supervision of expanded function dental auxiliaries, dental assistants, and dental hygienists. However, a dental therapist may supervise no more than a total of three expanded function dental auxiliaries, dental assistants, and dental hygienists at any one time in any one practice setting. A dental therapist may not supervise an expanded function dental auxiliary, dental assistant, or dental hygienist with respect to tasks that the dental therapist is not authorized to perform;
- (hh) Nonsurgical extractions of erupted permanent teeth under limited conditions; and

(ii) The dispensation and oral administration of drugs pursuant to subsection (2) of this section.

(2) (a) A dental therapist may dispense and orally administer the following drugs within the parameters of the practice plan contract established in RCW 18.265.060: Nonnarcotic analgesics, anti-inflammatories, preventive agents, and antibiotics.

(b) The authority to dispense and orally administer drugs extends only to the drugs identified in this subsection and may be further limited by the practice plan contract.

(c) The authority to dispense includes the authority to dispense sample drugs within the categories established in this subsection if the dispensing is permitted under the practice plan contract.

(d) A dental therapist may not dispense or administer narcotic drugs as defined in chapter 69.50 RCW.

(e) A dental therapist does not have the authority to prescribe drugs.

(3) A dental therapist may only provide services and procedures in which they have been educated.

(4) A dental therapist may not provide any service or procedure that is not both authorized by this section and been authorized by the supervising dentist via inclusion in the dental therapist's practice plan contract. [2023 c 460 s 6.]

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** See note following RCW 18.265.005.

**RCW 18.265.060 Supervising dentist—Practice plan contract—Requirements.** (1) A dental therapist may only practice dental therapy under the supervision of a dentist and pursuant to a written practice plan contract with the supervising dentist. A dental therapist may not practice independently. In circumstances authorized by the supervising dentist in the written practice plan contract, a dental therapist may provide services under off-site supervision. The contract must, at a minimum, contain the following elements:

(a) The level of supervision required and circumstances when the prior knowledge and consent of the supervising dentist is required;

(b) Practice settings where services and procedures may be provided;

(c) Any limitations on the services or procedures the dental therapist may provide;

(d) Age and procedure-specific practice protocols, including case selection criteria, assessment guidelines, and imaging frequency;

(e) Procedures for creating and maintaining dental records for patients treated by the dental therapist;

(f) A plan to manage medical emergencies in each practice setting where the dental therapist provides care;

(g) A quality assurance plan for monitoring care provided by the dental therapist or, including patient care review, referral follow-up, and a quality assurance chart review;

(h) Protocols for administering and dispensing medications, including the specific circumstances under which the medications may be dispensed and administered;

(i) Criteria relating to the provision of care to patients with specific medical conditions or complex medical histories, including requirements for consultation prior to the initiation of care; and

(j) Specific written protocols governing situations where the dental therapist encounters a patient requiring treatment that exceeds the dental therapist's scope of practice or capabilities and protocols for referral of patients requiring evaluation and treatment by dentists, denturists, physicians, \*advanced registered nurse practitioners, or other health care providers.

(2) The dental therapist shall accept responsibility for all services and procedures provided by the dental therapist or any auxiliary dental providers the dental therapist is supervising pursuant to the practice plan contract.

(3) A supervising dentist licensed under chapter 18.32 RCW who knowingly permits a dental therapist to provide a service or procedure that is not authorized in the practice plan contract, or any dental therapist who provides a service or procedure that is not authorized in the practice plan contract, commits unprofessional conduct for purposes of chapter 18.130 RCW.

(4) A dentist who enters into a written practice plan contract with a dental therapist shall:

(a) Directly provide or arrange for another dentist, denturist, or specialist to provide any necessary advanced procedures or services needed by the patient or any treatment that exceeds the dental therapist's scope of practice or capabilities;

(b) Ensure that he or she or another dentist is available to the dental therapist for timely communication during treatment if needed.

(5) A dental therapist shall perform only those services authorized by the supervising dentist and written practice plan contract and shall maintain an appropriate level of contact with the supervising dentist.

(6) A supervising dentist may supervise no more than a total of five dental therapists at any one time.

(7) Practice plan contracts must be signed and maintained by both the supervising dentist and the dental therapist.

(8) A dental therapist must submit a signed copy of the practice plan contract to the secretary at the time of licensure renewal. If the practice plan contract is revised in between license renewal, a signed copy of the revised practice plan contract must be submitted as soon as practicable after the revision is made. [2023 c 460 s 7.]

**\*Reviser's note:** The term "advanced registered nurse practitioner" was changed to "advanced practice registered nurse" by 2024 c 239 s 1, effective June 30, 2027.

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** See note following RCW 18.265.005.

**RCW 18.265.070 Exclusions from chapter.** Nothing in this chapter prohibits or affects:

(1) The practice of dental therapy by an individual otherwise licensed under this title and performing services within his or her scope of practice;

(2) The practice of dental therapy in the discharge of official duties on behalf of the United States government including, but not limited to, the armed forces, coast guard, public health service, veterans' bureau, or bureau of Indian affairs;

(3) The practice of dental therapy pursuant to an education program described in RCW 18.265.030;

(4) The practice of dental therapy under the supervision of a dentist necessary to meet the clinical experience or preceptorship requirements of RCW 18.265.030; or

(5) The practice of federally certified dental health aide therapists or tribally licensed dental health aide therapists as authorized under chapter 70.350 RCW. [2023 c 460 s 8.]

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** See note following RCW 18.265.005.

**RCW 18.265.080 Practice limited to federally qualified health centers and look-alikes.** (1) A dental therapist may practice only in federally qualified health centers, tribal federally qualified health centers, and federally qualified health center look-alikes.

(2) A dentist providing dental services at a federally qualified health center is not required to enter a practice plan contract and may not face retaliation or default on a loan repayment contract if the dentist refuses to enter into a practice plan contract or supervise a dental therapist.

(3) For purposes of this section, a "tribal federally qualified health center" means a tribal facility operating in accordance with Title XIX Sec. 1905(1)(2)(B) of the social security act and the Indian self-determination and education assistance act (P.L. 93-638) and that enrolls in Washington medicaid as a tribal federally qualified health center. [2023 c 460 s 9.]

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** See note following RCW 18.265.005.

**RCW 18.265.090 Limited license.** (1) The department shall issue a limited license to any applicant who, as determined by the secretary:

(a) Holds a valid license, certification, or recertification in another state, Canadian province, or has been certified or licensed by a federal or tribal governing board in the previous two years, that allows a substantially equivalent, but not the entire scope of practice in RCW 18.265.050;

(b) Is currently engaged in active practice in another state, Canadian province, or tribe;

(c) Files with the secretary documentation certifying that the applicant:

(i) (A) Has graduated from a dental therapy school accredited by the commission on dental accreditation; or

(B) Has graduated from a dental therapy education program before September 30, 2022, that the dental quality assurance commission determines is substantially equivalent to an accredited education program; and

(ii) Is licensed or certified to practice in another state or Canadian province, or has been certified or licensed by a federal or tribal governing board in the previous two years;

(d) Provides such information as the secretary deems necessary pertaining to the conditions and criteria of the uniform disciplinary act, chapter 18.130 RCW;

(e) Demonstrates to the secretary knowledge of Washington state law pertaining to the practice of dental therapy; and

(f) Pays any required fees.

(2) A person practicing with a limited license granted under this section has the authority to perform only those dental therapy procedures in RCW 18.265.050 that he or she was licensed or certified to practice in their previous state, tribe, or Canadian province.

(3) Upon demonstration of competency in all procedures in RCW 18.265.050, the limited license holder may apply for licensure as a dental therapist under RCW 18.265.030.

(4) The term of a limited license issued under this section is the same as the term for an initial limited license issued under \*RCW 18.29.190.

(5) The department may adopt rules necessary to implement and administer this section. [2023 c 460 s 11.]

**\*Reviser's note:** RCW 18.29.190 was amended by 2023 c 211 s 1, changing "initial limited license" to "initial temporary license."

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** See note following RCW 18.265.005.

**RCW 18.265.100 Application of uniform disciplinary act.** The uniform disciplinary act, chapter 18.130 RCW, governs the issuance and denial of licenses, unlicensed practice, and the discipline of persons licensed under this chapter. The dental quality assurance commission is the disciplining authority under this chapter. [2023 c 460 s 10.]

**Effective date—2023 c 460 ss 1-22:** See note following RCW 18.265.005.

**RCW 18.265.800 Rule making—Department of health—2023 c 460.** The department of health shall adopt any rules necessary to implement chapter 460, Laws of 2023. [2023 c 460 s 24.]