

**Resolution 1-05**

**Support for Dental Health Aide Program in Alaska**

**Submitted by:  
Alaska Public Health Association Board of Directors**

Recognizing that oral health is an integral part of overall Alaskans' health and well-being; and

Recognizing that nutrition, community water fluoridation, dental sealants, and personal dental hygiene are the primary approaches to prevention of dental disease<sup>1</sup>, reaffirming ALPHA's prior support of dental caries prevention and water fluoridation<sup>2</sup>; and

Recognizing that the children and adolescents of Alaska Natives are prone to dental caries at 2.5 times the rate of children in the US general population<sup>3</sup>; and

Recognizing that 60% of Alaska Native children under age five years suffer from severe early childhood caries<sup>3</sup>; and

Recognizing that dentists serving rural Alaska Natives have remarked that it is not uncommon to see a twenty year old with full dentures<sup>4</sup>; and

Recognizing that there is an overwhelming unmet dental need of Alaska Natives that has been longstanding and requires prompt action to prevent further unnecessary pain and suffering; and

Recognizing that the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium in compliance with federal law, has developed the Dental Health Aide Program (DHAP) to respond to these overwhelming dental needs; and

Recognizing that the DHAP is an expansion of the successful Community Health Aide Program, initiated in 1968, that provides overall medical care to Alaska Natives as part of the Alaska Tribal Health System<sup>5</sup>; and

Recognizing that the DHAP includes multiple levels of preventive and restorative dental health services, including the Dental Therapists, who are trained and educated in a certified program with professional supervision to perform primary prevention services as well as routine fillings and extractions; and

Recognizing that Dental Therapists have been used successfully in New Zealand for over 84 years as well as in 42 other countries<sup>6</sup>; and

Recognizing that in Saskatchewan, Canada, where Dental Therapists have been used for over 30 years, there have been no incidents of malpractice or any complaints reported to the Regional Disciplinary Board<sup>7</sup>; and

Recognizing that organized private dentistry and related professional organizations have vigorously opposed the Alaska Dental Therapist program<sup>3, 8, 9, 10</sup>; and

Recognizing that the Alaska Federation of Natives passed a resolution in support of dental health aides<sup>11</sup>;

Recognizing that at the national level, the American Public Health Association Governing Council has supported the use of expanded duties for dental care at least three times since 1966<sup>12</sup>;

**Therefore the Alaska Public Health Association resolves to:**

(1) Actively support best and promising practices, programs, and policies that will prevent and treat dental disease among Alaska Natives, including the Dental Health Aide Program;

(2) Encourage Congress to recognize and support the Dental Health Aide Program as a legitimate, practical and responsible program to help meet the needs of Alaska Natives;

(3) Urge key members of the U.S. Senate and House, the Administration and other interested parties, to support the Dental Health Aide Program, including but not limited to the following:

- Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs,
- U.S. Senators and Representatives of Alaska,
- Secretary of Health and Human Services,
- U.S. Surgeon General,
- Director, Health Services and Resources Administration (HRSA)
- Director, Indian Health Service,
- Alaska Dental Licensure Board
- Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, and any other key decision makers or organizations that should be notified as needed.

**Approved November 28, 2005 as revised, Alaska Public Health Association  
Annual Membership Meeting.**

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General, Rockville, MD: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health. 2000.

<sup>2</sup> ALPHA Resolutions 1-92, 3-93, 2-04

<sup>3</sup> Sekiguchi, E., Guay AH, Brown LJ, Spangler TJ. Improving the oral health of Alaska Natives. AJPH. 2005 May; 95(5):769

<sup>4</sup> Garvin, Jennifer. "Are dental therapists the answer to Alaska Natives' caries crisis?" Academy of General Dentistry. 2005 April [www.agd.org/library/2005/april/garvin.asp](http://www.agd.org/library/2005/april/garvin.asp) accessed 7/13/2005 Additionally supported from 1999 Indian Health Service Dental Assessment: 35-44 year olds only 24% had 28 teeth (an adult full dentition) 55+ only 1.4% had 28 teeth; 28.4% had at least 20 teeth; 26.3% had no teeth.

<sup>5</sup> *The Alaska Community Health Aide Program: An Integrative Literature Review and Visions for Future Research*. Washington, DC: Dept of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration; August 2003

<sup>6</sup> [www.fdiworldental.org/resources](http://www.fdiworldental.org/resources) [facts and figures] accessed 7/22/05

<sup>7</sup> personal communication, Darren Bradford, former chairperson of National Dental Therapy Working Group, Saskatchewan, Canada 1998-2002, 7/20/05

<sup>8</sup> Bramson, J. ada.edu, Executive Director's update. July 8, 2005

<sup>9</sup> Juneau Empire. May 26, 2005, Section C, p.7

<sup>10</sup> Brandjord, R.M., "Statement of the American Dental Association to the Committee of Indian Affairs and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions U.S. Senate on S. 1057 The Indian Health Care Improvement Act Amendments of 2005" July 14, 2005

<sup>11</sup> Alaska Native Health Board submitted resolution 2005-06, approved October 22, 2005 by the Alaska Federation of Natives annual convention in Fairbanks, Alaska.

<sup>12</sup> APHA Governing Council Resolutions: 6604: A National Dental Health Program for Children; 7214: Increased Utilization of Dental Auxiliaries; 8121: Employment of Expanded Function Dental Auxiliaries in Public Dental Care Programs. APHA, Washington, DC

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Census 2000.