

**Wisconsin Public Health Association Resolution:**  
***Support Expanded Practice and Practice Settings for Dental Hygienists to  
Improve Access and Increase Workforce Capacity***

**WHEREAS**, national, state, and county reports extensively document oral disease burdens and health disparities;<sup>1 2</sup>

**WHEREAS**, it is documented that individuals lacking the social determinants of health, including the financial means to pay for dental care (i.e. uninsured, low income, Medicaid recipient difficulty finding providers), and physical impediments to getting to a dental office, (i.e. not in geographic proximity, institutionalized), are the most vulnerable to oral disease;<sup>3</sup>

**WHEREAS**, Wisconsin has documented dentist shortages for low income populations;<sup>4</sup>

**WHEREAS**, dental hygienists are part of the public health workforce;

**WHEREAS**, dental hygienists are oral disease prevention specialists and evidence shows that the dental hygiene scope of services prevent oral diseases and promote overall health;

**WHEREAS**, dental hygienists graduate from educational institutions accredited by the American Dental Association, Commission on Dental Accreditation; have passed national written examinations, regional clinical examinations, and are licensed by the State of Wisconsin to practice dental hygiene.<sup>5</sup>

**WHEREAS**, dental hygienists in public health settings practice by agency protocol, use the consultation and referral model to promote coordinated, comprehensive, culturally sensitive medical and dental homes;

**WHEREAS**, Wisconsin registered dental hygienists have offered dental hygiene procedures without the authorization or oversight of a dentist, onsite in schools and local health departments, since 2004 without disciplinary actions or complaints and improved access to health services;

**WHEREAS**, *Oral Health and Workforce Focus Area Profiles of Healthiest Wisconsin 2020* cite “expanding the scope of practice for dental hygienists and the types of settings where dental hygienists may practice independently of a dentist” as a potential evidence- or science-based actions to move the focus area objectives forward over the decade;<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, be it resolved that the Wisconsin Public Health Association:

1. Supports efforts to expand the settings where dental hygienists practice independently.
2. Encourages public health agencies to employ or contract with dental hygienists to improve access to prevention services.
3. Urges policy-makers to consult with WPHA to expand settings and dental hygiene practice as avenues to address oral health disparities, a significant public health problem.

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<sup>1</sup> United States Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. (2000). Retrieved May 17, 2011. [http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/Oral\\_Health/reports/SurgeonGen.htm](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/Oral_Health/reports/SurgeonGen.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Division of Public Health *Healthy Smiles for a Healthy Head Start — The Oral Health of Wisconsin’s Children* (2009). [http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/Oral\\_Health/docs/HSSummary.pdf](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/Oral_Health/docs/HSSummary.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services, *Oral Health Focus Area Profiles*, (2010). <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/hw2020/pdf/oralhealth.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Primary Care Program, *Map of Dentist Shortages for Low-Income Populations – Wisconsin 2007* (2010) retrieved May 18, 2011. <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/PrimaryCare/docs/DentistshortagemapFeb2010.pdf>

<sup>5 5</sup> Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing, (2005). *Regulatory Digest*. Available at: <http://drl.wi.gov/boards/den/digest/index.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Focus Area Profiles (2010). Retrieved May 18, 2011 <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/hw2020/focusareas/profiles.htm>