

Senate Bill 3122 Sponsor: Senator Melinda Bush
Public Health Dental Hygienists (PHDHs) in Nursing Homes

SB3122: Improve Access to Oral Care for Nursing Home and Long-term Care Residents!

SB3122 would enable certified *Public Health Dental Hygienists* (PHDHs) to provide preventive oral care to underserved Illinois residents of nursing home and long-term care communities, as 38 U.S. states permit. Governmental studies found poor oral health increases death from COVID-19. Therefore, the CDC is stressing the removal of workforce barriers to increase preventive oral care by PHDHs to populations disproportionately affected by the pandemic, such as residents of nursing homes and long-term care communities, as does this bill. https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2020/pdf/20_0266.pdf

PHDHs are Highly Educated and Qualified:

Licensed *Registered Dental Hygienists* (RDHs) and additionally certified PHDHs complete far more health-related college courses than do caregivers typically responsible for providing care (including oral hygiene) for residents of nursing homes and long-term care communities. RDH programs typically require 81 college credits, compared to 68 for RNs, 37 for PNs, and zero (4-weeks online) for CNAs. <https://www.cnaonlinecourse.com/cna-certification-illinois>
<https://www.harpercollege.edu/academics/health/dental/dental.php> <https://www.harpercollege.edu/academics/health/nursing/index.php>

RDH courses focus on preventing, recognizing and responding to medical emergencies. RDHs take the same *BLS for Healthcare Providers* as other healthcare professionals including dentists, physicians and nurses. Every 3 years, PHDHs and dentists complete 48 *Continuing Education Units* (CEUs) while RDHs complete 36 CEUs. <https://www.ilga.gov/commission/jcar/admincode/068/068012200B02400R.html>

PHDHs:

- Cannot bill patients for services or work independently.
- Have a written collaborative agreement with a supervising Illinois dentist.
- Have over 4000 hours of clinical experience prior to seeking PHDH certification.
- Are licensed dental hygienists additionally certified to see patients before their dental exam.
- Assess needs, provide preventive care, and case manage patients to see the supervising dentist.
- See uninsured patients eligible for Medicaid with an income <200% of the federal poverty level.
- Work in FQHCs; federal, state, and local health facilities; school-based health and dental centers; Head Start programs; and WIC programs.
- Complete 42 CEUs to become PHDH Certified, including: *Emergency Procedures for Medically Compromised Patients; Pharmacology; Medical Recordkeeping; Geriatric Dentistry; Pediatric Dentistry; and Pathology; and Special Needs Dentistry; and Teledentistry; Nutritional Needs of Geriatric and Low income Patients; Communication Techniques with Non-English-speaking Patients; Cultural Competency; or Professional Ethics; plus, the PHDH Review and Exam.* <https://idha.wildapricot.org/PHDH>

SB3122: Improve Access to Oral Care for Nursing Home and Long-term Care Residents!

Barriers to Care:

According to *Illinois Oral Health Plan IV: Eliminating Inequities in Oral Health (2021-2025)* health inequities are human-created unjust, avoidable differences in health status among various population groups. Untreated oral conditions impact overall health and quality of life. One *Oral Health Plan IV* objective is to Increase the number of Public Health Dental Hygienists (PHDHs) practicing in dental health profession shortage areas to reduce oral health inequities. <https://dph.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/idph/publications/idph/topics-and-services/prevention-wellness/oral-health/oral-health-plans/Illinois%20Oral%20Health%20Plan%20IV.pdf>

NIH Oral Health in America: Advances and Challenges explains that older adults have the highest risk for poor oral health of all age groups because many lack dental insurance, have underlying health conditions, lack access to care, and have limited financial resources. Receiving appropriate oral care is especially difficult for frail, disabled, homebound, cognitively impaired persons, and those residing in long-term care communities. The report says state practice acts often reduce access to care by limiting where oral health professionals can work. It recommends policy changes to reduce or eliminate inequities affecting access to oral care.

<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/oralhealthinamerica>

IDHA Initiated *Public Health Dental Hygienists (PHDHs)*:

Illinois law requires individuals to have an exam by a dentist before receiving preventive oral services from *Registered Dental Hygienists (RDHs)*. While this law is a surprise to many, it prevents most underserved Illinois residents from receiving any oral care at all. Far too few dentists accept Medicaid, practice in rural areas, or are available to provide an exam in settings such as nursing homes and long-term care communities.

The *Illinois Dental Hygienists' Association (IDHA)* initiated *Public Health Dental Hygienists (PHDHs)* as a practical solution for oral health disparities. PHDHs are licensed Illinois dental hygienists with at least two years of fulltime clinical experience prior becoming additionally certified as PHDHs. PHDH certification allows PHDHs to provide preventive care before individuals see a dentist. PHDHs assess needs, provide preventive services, and case-manage patients to see the supervising dentist for their exam and treatment. IDHA's *PHDH Certification Program* adheres to *Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation* requirements.

www.idha.net/phdh

Over 100 Certified PHDHs are Currently Working in Illinois:

PHDHs currently work in Illinois *Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs)*; federal, state, and local health facilities; school-based health and dental centers; *Head Start* programs; and *Women, Infant, and Children's (WIC)* programs. PHDHs are supervised by a licensed Illinois dentist who has chosen to enter a written collaborative agreement outlining permitted oral health services. PHDHs cannot work independently or bill patients for services. PHDHs see patients that are eligible for Medicaid, are uninsured, and have a household income less than 200% of the federal poverty level. PHDHs see patients of all ages and medical conditions.

www.idha.net/phdh