Changes in Dental Hygiene Scope of Practice by State Between 2019 and 2024

OHWRC Oral Health Workforce Research Center

Theekshana Fernando, MBBS, MPH, CHES®, Sage Shirey, MA , Simona Surdu, PhD, MD

Oral Health Workforce Research Center • Center for Health Workforce Studies • College of Integrated Health Sciences • University at Albany

BACKGROUND

- In the US, state-based laws and regulations define legal scope of practice (SOP) for dental hygienists (DHs)
- These determine which treatments and procedures DHs may perform in certain settings as well as those that can only be performed by a dentist
- They also determine the supervision level required to perform certain procedures
- Research indicates that a broader SOP for DHs improves access to oral healthcare, increases utilization, and improves outcomes[1-3]
- Original 'Variation in Dental Hygiene Scope of Practice by State' infographic was developed in 2017 to inform policy-relevant action and was updated in 2019

STUDY OBJECTIVES

- Review current laws and regulations defining SOP for DHs
- Update the 2019 infographic
- Highlight changes to the regulatory landscape

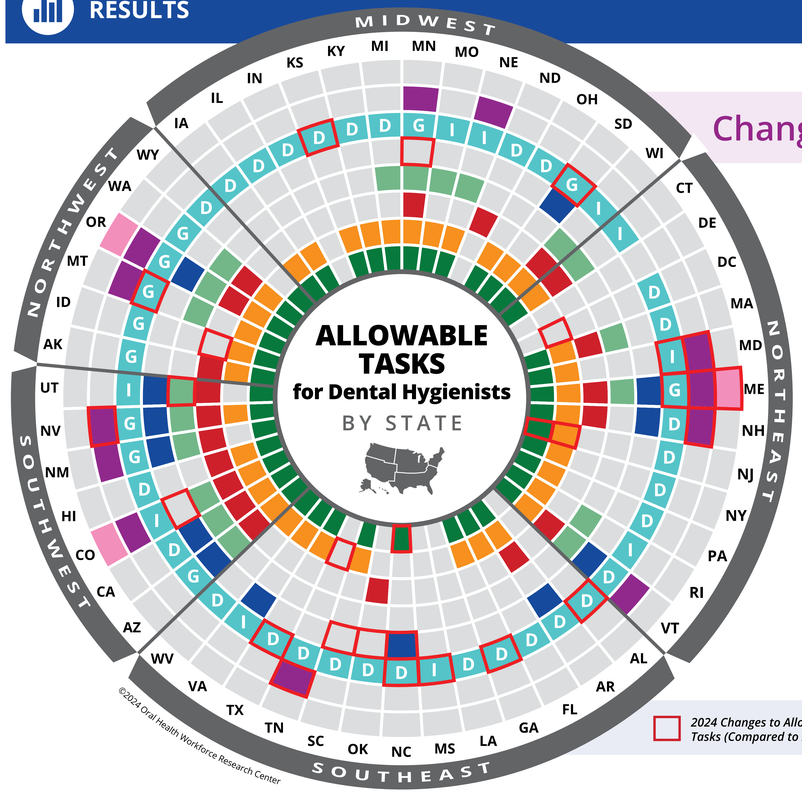
METHODS

- Researchers independently examined state-level laws and regulations describing legal SOP for DHs across all 50 states and the District of Columbia (DC)
  - Reviewed the Dental Practice Act and/or the Administrative Code
  - For each variable, determined the highest level of practice available to a DH
- Findings were compared to regulatory overviews conducted by the American Dental Hygiene Association in 2023
- Conducted outreach to various state dental hygiene associations to verify findings

LIMITATIONS

- Not all state dental hygienist associations responded to outreach
- Certain procedures that are permissible may not be captured in the law/regulation
- Regulations continue to evolve and may have shifted between now and the time this infographic was produced
- Variation of definitions and other nuances between states

RESULTS



Dental Hygiene Diagnosis
The identification of oral conditions for which treatment falls within the dental hygiene scope of practice, as part of a dental hygiene treatment plan.

Prescriptive Authority
The ability to prescribe, administer, and dispense fluoride, topical medications, and chlorhexidine.

Local Anesthesia
The administration of local anesthesia.

LEVEL OF SUPERVISION

- **D Direct:** The dentist is required to be physically present during the administration of local anesthesia by the dental hygienist.
- **I Indirect:** The dentist is required to be on the premises during the administration of local anesthesia by the dental hygienist.*
- **G General:** The dentist is required to authorize the administration of local anesthesia by the dental hygienist but is not required to be on the premises during the procedure.

Supervision of Dental Assistants
The ability to supervise dental assistants when performing tasks within the dental hygiene scope of practice.

Direct Medicaid Reimbursement
The direct Medicaid reimbursement of dental hygiene services to the dental hygienist.

Dental Hygiene Treatment Planning
The ability of a dental hygienist to assess oral conditions and formulate treatment plans for services within the dental hygiene scope of practice.

Provision of Sealants Without Prior Examination
The ability of a dental hygienist working in a public health setting to provide sealants without prior examination by a dentist.

Direct Access to Prophylaxis from a Dental Hygienist
The ability of a dental hygienist working in a public health setting to provide prophylaxis without prior examination by a dentist.

Not Allowed / No Law

** In Colorado, indirect supervision requires only preapproval, not the presence of a dentist.*

Changes in DH SOP Between 2019 and 2024

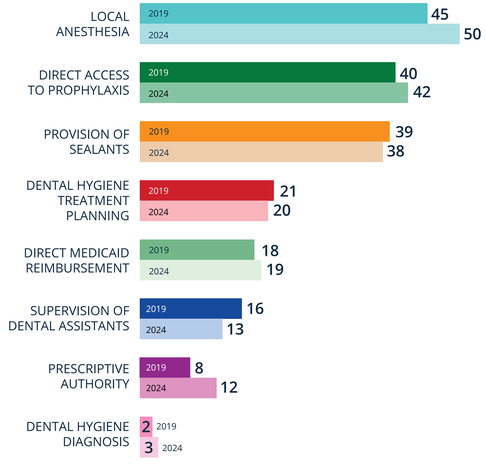
Notable Shifts in 2024

5 Additional States Allow DHs to Administer Local Anesthesia

4 Additional States Allow DHs Prescriptive Authority

2 Additional States Allow DHs Direct Access to Prophylaxis

Changes in Allowable Tasks for DHs by Number of States, 2019 vs 2024



CONCLUSIONS

- In 2024, there were notable and positive shifts, with more states allowing DHs to:
  - Administer local anesthesia
  - Prescribe, administer, and dispense fluoride, topical medications, and chlorohexidine
  - Provide prophylaxis without prior examination by a dentist
- Keeping track of shifting regulatory landscape remains challenging and labor-intensive

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Oral Health Workforce Research Center (OHWRC)

@ The Center for Health Workforce Studies

College of Integrated Health Sciences, University at Albany

www.oralhealthworkforce.org | info@oralhealthworkforce.org

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