Tribal Dental Therapy Law in Michigan


**Tribes in Support of Dental Therapy in Michigan:** No Tribes in Michigan have passed resolutions of support.

**Status:** Signed into Law

**Legislation:** [Senate Bill 541](https://www.legislature.mi.gov/BillDisplay?BillId=541-2017-2)

**Sponsor:** Sen. Mike Shirkey (R-16)

**Legislative History:**
- 9/07/2017  Introduced in Senate, Referred to Senate Committee on Health Policy
- 10/10/2017  Reported Favorably out of Committee without Amendment
- 10/11/2017  Passed Senate on a [Vote of 21-15](https://www.legislature.mi.gov/M tramWeb/MtramWeb.aspx?Session=2017&Year=1&VoteId=1243021)
- 10/11/2017  Referred to House Committee on Health Policy
- 12/05/2018  Reported Favorably out of Committee with [Amendment](https://www.legislature.mi.gov/BillDisplay?BillId=541-2017-2&Year=2017&Session=1&Committee=House%20Committee%20on%20Health%20Policy&SubCommittee=&Status=Amendment&Revision=1)
- 12/18/2018  Passed House on a [Vote of 68-41](https://www.legislature.mi.gov/MtramWeb/MtramWeb.aspx?Session=2017&Year=1&VoteId=1463271)
- 12/19/2018  Passed Senate on a [Vote of 23-15](https://www.legislature.mi.gov/MtramWeb/MtramWeb.aspx?Session=2017&Year=1&VoteId=1463271)
- 12/28/2018  Signed into Law by Governor Snyder

**Summary:**
- Establishes the licensing process for dental therapists (DTs) in the state of Michigan.
- Allows licensed DTs to practice under a dentist as part of an oral healthcare delivery team.
- Requires a 500 hour preceptorship, and 35 hours of Continuing Education every two years.
- Allows dentists to require stricter supervision or a more limited scope of practice within the Written Practice Agreement.
- Allows dentists to hire up to four DTs, and allows DTs to supervise dental assistants and hygienists.
• Enumerates settings in which a DT can practice, including Tribal and Urban Indian health programs, Federally Qualified Health Centers, schools, clinics and mobile programs serving underserved populations, and any setting in a dental shortage area.
• Five years after enactment, two dental therapists are appointed on the Michigan Board of Dentistry.
• Seven years after enactment, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services will conduct a study on the impact of dental therapists in the state.

**Tribal Inclusion:** Section 16654(d) allows a dental therapist to practice in outpatient Tribal health programs and facilities, as well as Urban Indian Organizations. The section also allows dental therapists to practice in Hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers, Dental Shortage Areas, school-based health centers, mobile units, and settings providing care for underserved populations.

**General or Direct Supervision:** A 500-hour preceptorship must be completed under a dentist’s direct supervision (dentist is present in the room). Following that, supervision can be direct or general (dentist is available for remote consultation) under the terms of each dentist’s Written Collaborative Management Agreement with the DT.

**Educational Requirements:** The bill does not explicitly state education standards beyond requiring the DT to have graduated from a postsecondary program accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA). CODA mandates a three academic year program for DTs with no degree requirement.

**Dual License Requirement:** A licensed DT does **NOT** need also to hold a dental hygienist license.

**Medicaid Reimbursement:** The legislation allows for dental therapists to bill for third party reimbursement, including through the state’s Medicaid program.

**Moving Forward:** Governor Snyder signed the bill into law before leaving office at the end of 2018. Before the state can begin granting licenses to dental therapists, it must finalize rules governing Medicaid reimbursement and other issues. Tribes must remain vigilant to ensure that the process follows the spirit of the law in allowing Tribes to use DTs.

Overall, the new law is favorable to Tribal adoption of dental therapy, with few barriers that would weaken the workforce model’s potential for reducing Michigan Tribes’ unmet oral health needs.