



April 24, 2014

Senator Judy Lee
 Chairman, Health Services Committee
 North Dakota Legislative Assembly

Re: North Dakota Legislative Hearing on Dental Therapists

Dear Senator Lee:

The American Public Health Association (APHA) views access to preventive and therapeutic oral health services as vitally important for all Americans. For that reason, APHA urges the North Dakota Legislative Assembly's Health Services Committee to recommend legislation enabling the licensure of dental therapists in North Dakota.

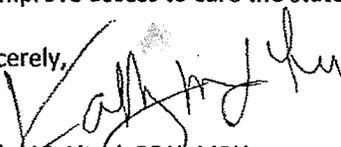
According to the 2000 U.S. Surgeon General's report, *Oral Health in America*, the burden of oral problems is extensive and particularly severe in vulnerable, underserved populations throughout the United States, particularly in North Dakota.

"...there are critical shortages of dentists in the Plains as well as in sparsely populated sections of northern New England and the fast-growing suburbs of the Southwest.... In the Dakotas, the situation will soon get worse The state has 320 dentists today, down from 361 in 1999. A survey of North Dakota's dentists showed that 40 percent planned to retire in the next decade." (The New York Times, August 7, 2002)

Dental therapists have been providing dental care since the early 1920s and are now deployed in more than 54 countries throughout the world, most recently in the United States, in Alaska and Minnesota. The technical quality of care and the public's acceptance of treatment by dental therapists are well-documented.

Accordingly, APHA supports the addition of dental therapists to North Dakota's oral health care workforce in order to improve access to care the state's underserved populations.

Sincerely,


 Kathy M. Lituri, RDH, MPH,
 Chair, Oral Health Section
 American Public Health Association

***About APHA:** The American Public Health Association promotes best practices and advocates for public health issues and policies grounded in research. APHA combines a 140-plus year perspective, a broad-based member community and the ability to influence federal, state and local policy to improve the public's health. The Mission of APHA is to improve the health of the public and achieve equity in health status. The Oral Health (OH) Section of APHA is comprised of more than 300 members, mostly dentists and dental hygienists, working in public health practice, administration, research, or teaching.*