



Health Briefs: Report highlights dentist shortage

Written by: John Bush, July 27, 2015

Columbus — On Wednesday, a statewide coalition of providers, consumers and health care advocates highlighted new numbers showing an increase in demand for dental care. The coalition, Dental Access Now!, released data from Health Resources and Services Administration showing demand for services compared to the supply of dental workforce over the next decade.

“When it comes to dental care, particularly for low-income and rural Ohioans, we have been falling behind,” said David Maywhoor, project director of Dental Access Now! “Unfortunately, we will see the shortage of dentists grow over the next decade, making access to dental care for underserved communities even more difficult.”

The report’s key findings regarding dentists include:

- All 50 states are projected to see their dentist supply be outpaced by demand between 2012 and 2025.
- Nationally, the demand for dental care services is projected to grow. Although the supply of the oral health workforce is also expected to grow, the growth in supply of dentists in 2025 will be smaller than that of demand, leading to significant unmet needs.
- In Ohio, at least 235 more dentists are needed to meet the needs of Ohioans today.
- Unlike the national trend, Ohio’s projected supply of dentists will decrease by 2025. In 2012, Ohio had 6,260 dentists. By 2025 the number of dentists in our state is projected to be just 5,887. Ohio will be “short” 627 dentists to meet the demand in 2025.

The report also estimated the dental hygienist workforce. The report found that unlike dentists, the supply of hygienists is keeping up with demand. Nationally, it is projected that by 2025, that there will more hygienists than the need. In Ohio, demand will increase slightly for hygienists, and there is projected to be a larger growth in supply, leaving approximately 821 more hygienists than demand.

The coalition is advocating for a workforce model that will allow for mid-level providers called dental therapists. A dental therapist is a mid-level provider who is rigorously trained in preventive and routine dental care. Working under a dentist’s supervision, dental therapists expand the reach of the dental care team, providing routine services, including fillings, non-surgical extractions and preventive care. In addition to establishing a new provider, the model allows for additional education opportunities for hygienists to be able to perform their traditional scope of preventive services as well as the restorative services of a dental therapist.

A copy of the report can be found at

<http://bhw.hrsa.gov/healthworkforce/supplydemand/dentistry/nationalstatelevelprojectionsdentists.pdf>.