

Expanding scopes of practice for dental hygienists improves oral health

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A CWHS study finds that scope of practice closely aligned with dental hygiene professional competence produces a significant association with positive oral health outcomes. Credit: University at Albany

Research conducted by the University at Albany's Center for Health Workforce Studies (CHWS) finds that in states where dental hygienists are allowed by law to practice at higher levels of professional competence and skill, the population's oral health notably improves.

The paper, published in *Health Affairs'* December 2016 thematic issue on [oral health](#), examines impacts of [dental hygiene](#) "scope of practice" on oral health outcomes. Scope of practice for health professionals is

defined by individual states' laws and regulations, which describe permissible settings, allowable services, and requisite supervision by other health professionals.

CHWS researchers examined 2014 scope of practice parameters for dental hygienists across the nation and found that in states where dental hygiene scope of practice rules were closely aligned with dental hygiene professional competence, there was a statistically significant association with positive oral health outcomes in the population.

The paper, "Expanded Scopes of Practice For Dental Hygienists Associated With Improved Oral Health Outcomes For Adults," be highlighted at a briefing event in Washington D.C. convened by *Health Affairs* on December 7, 2016. Deputy Director Margaret Langelier of the Oral Health Workforce Research Center (OHWRC) at CHWS, who led the research team for the study, will present findings at the briefing.

"Demonstrating that broader scopes of practice for dental hygienists are correlated with better oral [health outcomes](#) is very useful, especially in public health settings," said Langelier. "The impact of scope of practice is an important consideration for policymakers when identifying strategies to increase the availability of preventive oral health services, particularly for underserved populations."

More information: M. Langelier et al. Expanded Scopes Of Practice For Dental Hygienists Associated With Improved Oral Health Outcomes For Adults, *Health Affairs* (2016). [DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0807](https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0807)

Provided by University at Albany

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