Talking Points
MDHA Legislative 2021

Following an executive order from President Trump, in December 2018 the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), Treasury and Labor, in collaboration with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission and White House offices made public policy recommendations in a report titled Reforming America’s Healthcare System Through Choice and Competition. Relevant to the issue at hand, the report said, “dental hygienists can safely and effectively provide some services offered by dentists, as well as complementary services.” It also recommended:

- States should consider changes to their scope-of-practice statutes to allow all healthcare providers to practice to the top of their license, utilizing their full skill set.
- States should consider eliminating requirements for rigid collaborative practice and supervision agreements between physicians and dentists and their care extenders (e.g., physician assistants, hygienists) that are not justified by legitimate health and safety concerns.

FTC
The FTC’s law enforcement and policy initiatives have long recognized the competitive benefits that arise from greater reliance on dental hygienists and other affiliated providers, such as nurse practitioners and physician assistants. For consumers to realize these benefits, however, state laws and regulations must allow these providers to practice to the “top of their license,” i.e., to the full extent of their training and knowledge.

Ohio State “necessary to address any legitimate and substantiated health and safety concerns, and whether a less restrictive alternative might achieve such goals without unduly burdening competition.”
Georgia State “The comment said that fewer restrictions on dental hygienists likely would enhance competition in the provision of preventive dental care services and thereby benefit Georgia consumers, particularly underserved populations with limited access to preventive care.”
National Governors’ Association
The Role of Dental Hygienists in Providing Access to Oral Health Care

“Although limited domestic research exists on the safety and efficacy of an expanded scope of practice for dental hygienists, studies of pilot programs have shown safe and effective outcomes.”

“As states face more demand for oral health, they should examine the role that dental hygienists can play in increasing access to care by allowing them to practice to the full extent of their education and training.”

Unnecessary regulation is dampening entrepreneurship in the dental industry in Montana.

Workforce
2017 data 476 practicing general dentists (including pediatric dentists), although 821 dentist licensees. Which indicates that licensing data alone is not an accurate measure of access to care. Workforce data 2017: 2018 Oral Health Workforce Assessment (mt.gov)

In 2020, there are 486 practicing dentists in Montana (includes general and pediatric dentists). Data source: WIM Tracking

MSU-Great Falls Dental Hygiene program is expanding, given the $4.25 million appropriation during the 2019 legislature. Taking 25 students in 2021 (14-16 students in the past).

“...proponents say it will bring scores of jobs to the community, boost the state and local economies and offer new pathways for more students to earn high-paying jobs.”
Between Spring 2007 and Summer 2020, 203 dental hygiene graduates from the program.

Medicaid
In a 2017 survey, 74 (15.5%) dentists were accepting new adult Medicaid patients and 149 (31.3%) were accepting new child Medicaid patients. Data source: WIM Tracking

Utilization
In 2015, more than one in five (21.3%) adults in the U.S. reported they had not visited a dentist in the last few years. Of the adults in Montana reporting they had not visited a dentist in the last 12 months, 58% said they do not seek dental care due to cost, 24% stated they were afraid of the dentist and 10% said they did not perceive a need to visit a dentist. Data source: Health Policy Institute (ADA)

COVID
Rates of childhood immunizations are down due to SARS-CoV-2, which indicates that Montana families are deferring medical and dental care during the pandemic. Bringing dental care to families in community settings will bridge this gap in care. Issue Brief
Many RDHs are seeing this in their practices also, delayed dental care.