



Roles and Functions of the Oral Health Team

Team-based oral health care offers a comprehensive, patient-focused experience that can bring care to more people in their community and help achieve good oral health for all. While the oral health workforce may look different in each state, here are some of the experts that are part of the care delivery team.

Dentist

Dentists supervise dental hygienists, dental therapists, and dental assistants and usually work in a dental clinic. They can provide the full array of dental procedures and treatments with some pursuing specializations (e.g. orthodontics, endodontics).



Dental therapist

Dental therapists provide care in offices and community settings, such as schools, senior centers, and mobile clinics. They are specifically trained to work in dental shortage areas to provide routine dental care, including exams and filling cavities. They always work under the supervision of a dentist.



Dental hygienist

Dental hygienists specialize in preventing disease, focusing on procedures like sealants, fluoride varnish, preventing and treating gum disease, and promoting good oral health practices. They work in clinic or community settings and, depending on the state, can work independently or under a dentist's supervision.



Dental assistant



Dental assistants work in offices and community settings, supporting other providers and administering basic services (e.g., x-rays, equipment sterilization). They often serve as a second set of hands for another member of the dental team, providing critical chairside support.

Community care connector

Community care connectors, like community health workers, promotoras, community health representatives, and community dental health coordinators, work in community settings providing health education, care coordination, and referrals to providers. They offer support, addressing both health and social needs, and center the holistic health of communities and individuals.



Medical provider

Medical providers, such as primary care physicians, pediatricians, and nurses, have a role in a patient's oral care through education, basic oral health services (e.g. topical fluoride), and referrals. They are usually the first person to provide oral health care to infants.



Other team members

This is not a comprehensive list of providers involved in oral health. Other professions like denturists, dental health aides, mental and behavioral health providers, and home health aides all play an important part.

