



**Alaska Native
Tribal Health Consortium**

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**Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium responds to positive evaluation of
Alaska Dental Health Aide Therapist Program**

Dental Health Aide Therapists are providing safe, competent, and appropriate dental services in Alaska, RTI International concluded based on its two year intensive independent evaluation. The much anticipated results of the first independent evaluation of US-based dental therapists validates the work of the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) to adapt the mid-level practice model used successfully in 50 other countries to the challenging environment of rural Alaska.

ANTHC began exploring alternative oral health care models in June 2000 in response to rural Alaska's extraordinary unmet need for oral health services. Alaskan children and families have some of the highest levels of oral disease in the country. Many rural residents receive no oral health care until they have a life threatening dental emergency. Some never receive care at all.

Despite the concerted efforts of federal and tribal health programs, there have never been enough dentists in Alaska to provide critically needed oral health services; much less the preventive and routine care many Americans take for granted. Temporary/itinerant dentists simply do not have the capacity to provide more than a fraction of the care that is needed.

To address this, ANTHC and other tribal organizations combined two proven models – the community health aide program that has extended care to rural Alaskans for decades and the mid-level dental therapist model used in over 50 countries in the world.

The RTI Evaluation focused on the first step of the DHAT model, DHATs who were trained at Otago University in New Zealand, where mid-level dental providers have been successfully used for 50 years. Dental health aide therapists receive two years of intensive training and provide prevention, education and basic dental care services, working under the supervision of a dentist.

Decades of research shows that the preventive and basic dental services provided by dental therapists are safe and cost-effective. The RTI evaluation verifies that Alaska DHATs are also capable of providing safe, competent and appropriate care. While the sample sizes were small, getting adequate samples in rural Alaska is always a challenge and the evaluation does demonstrate that the DHATs are performing well in a wide range of rural settings.

ANTHC is especially pleased by how well it is working in such diverse settings in rural Alaska since it promises to increase access to safe and effective oral health care by expanding the dental workforce in Alaska and extending our limited resources.



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The RTI evaluation did not include the DHATs trained at the new Alaska-based DHAT training centers established by ANTHC in partnership with the University of Washington and the Yuut Elitnaurviat– People’s Learning Center due to the newness of this component of the program.

ANTHC appreciates the vision, contributions and support of its key partners, including the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Rasmuson Foundation, Bethel Community Services Foundation, Yuut Elitnaurviat, University of Washington, University of Kentucky, M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust, Paul G. Allen Foundation, Ford Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Denali Commission, Indian Health Service, Health Resources and Services Administration, Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, Norton Sound Health Corporation, Mount Sanford Tribal Consortium, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Eastern Aleutian Tribes, Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Maniilaq Association, Southcentral Foundation, Bristol Bay Area Health Corporation, Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium, Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments, Alaska Native Health Board, Senator Stevens, Senator Murkowski, Senator Begich, Congressman Young, and the State of Alaska.

If you would like to help to contribute to this critical program, please visit the Healthy Alaska Natives Foundation website at <http://inspiringgoodhealth.org>.

-Andy Teuber, ANTHC President and Chair

About the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium is a not-for-profit tribal health organization managed by Alaska Native tribal governments and their regional health organizations. We provide statewide services in specialty medical care; construction of water, sanitation and health facilities; community health and research; information technology and professional recruiting. For more information, please visit www.anthc.org.