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Gov. Shumlin Celebrates Law to Expand Dental Services to More Vermonters

Williston – Gov. Peter Shumlin today celebrated a law that establishes dental therapists as a new designation of mid-level providers that will expand access to basic dental care across Vermont.

“This new law will improve access to high-quality, cost-effective dental care for Vermonters in all parts of the state,” said Gov. Shumlin. “This is important because there’s a direct connection between oral health and overall health. Having dental therapists available to work with dentists and hygienists will make it easier for Vermonters to get the care they need, closer to home and no matter what type of insurance they have.”

The Governor signed the bill into law on June 2. The celebration of the new law was held at Vermont Technical College’s Williston Campus which houses the state’s dental hygiene program and will also create a new program to train dental therapists.

The new law creates a licensing level of dental care providers that is mid-way between a hygienist and a dentist, and sets high standards for education, testing and supervision. Dental therapists will be able to perform more procedures than a hygienist, such as fillings, simple tooth extractions, temporary crowns, and more procedures aimed at treating children.

“Our coalition has been working for six years to raise awareness about the connection between dental health and overall health, and the lack of equitable access to care. Children, older adults, people with disabilities and those with low incomes find it particularly hard to access dental care,” said Michelle Fay, Associate Director of Voices for Vermont’s Children. “It’s gratifying to know that dental therapists will help bridge this gap in Vermont.”

Other states – such as Alaska and Minnesota – that have created dental therapist programs have seen an increase in high-quality dental care among rural and low-income patients. In Vermont access to dental care is complicated by an unequal distribution of dentists across the state. Vermont also faces a future shortage of dental care providers, with more than 60 percent of dentists now over the age of 50.

“Far too many Vermonters have to go without necessary dental care, and dental therapists are a proven solution to this problem,” said Falko Schilling, Consumer and Environmental Advocate. “Thanks to the work of the Vermont Legislature, the Shumlin Administration, and the Vermont Oral Health Care for All Coalition we will now be able to expand our dental workforce and provide first class care for Vermonters in need.”

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