

National Indian Health Board's Tribal Oral Health Initiative:

Using Dental Therapy to Meet Indian Country's Oral Health Needs

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National Indian
Health Board

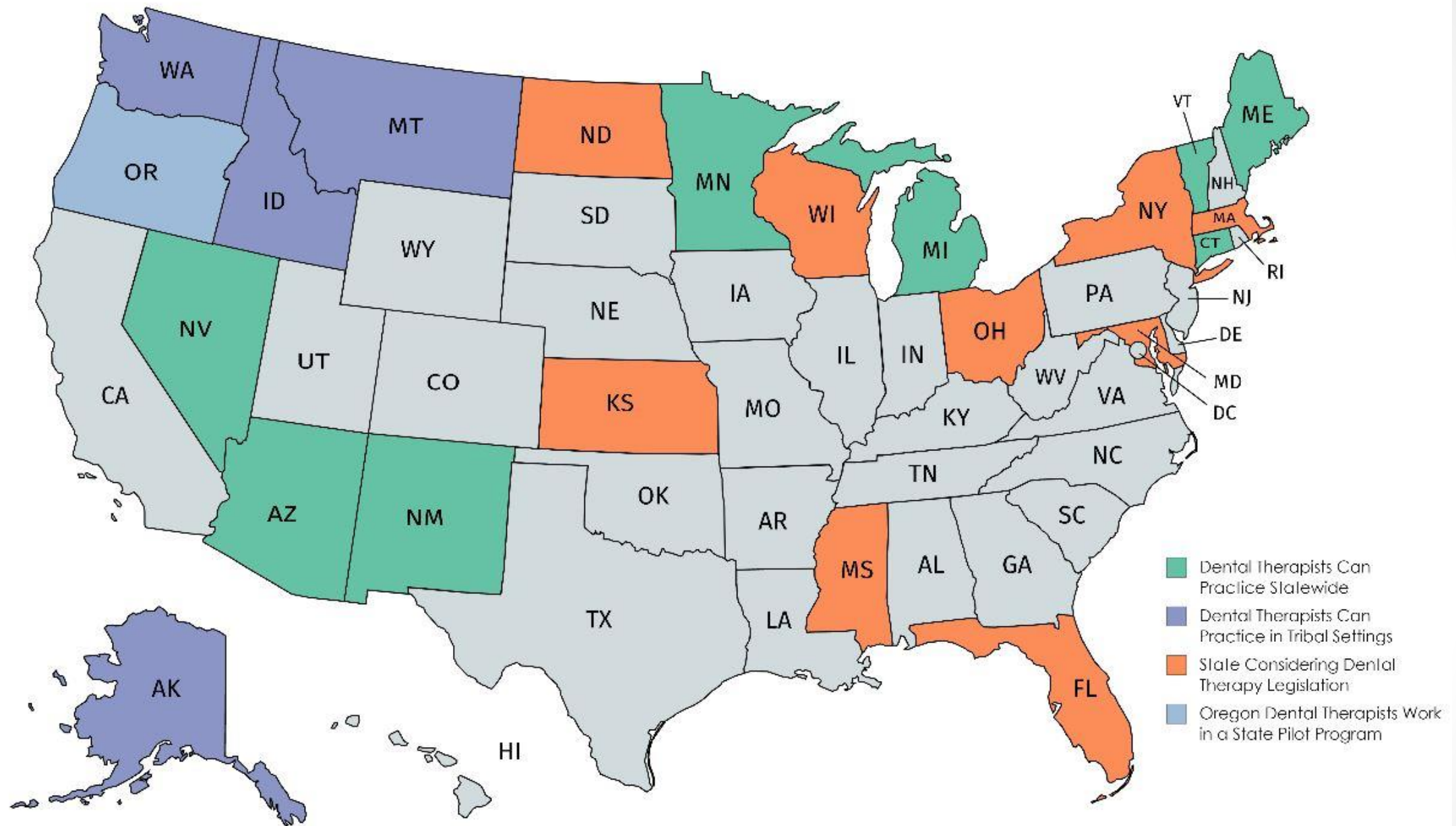


What Exactly are Dental Therapists?



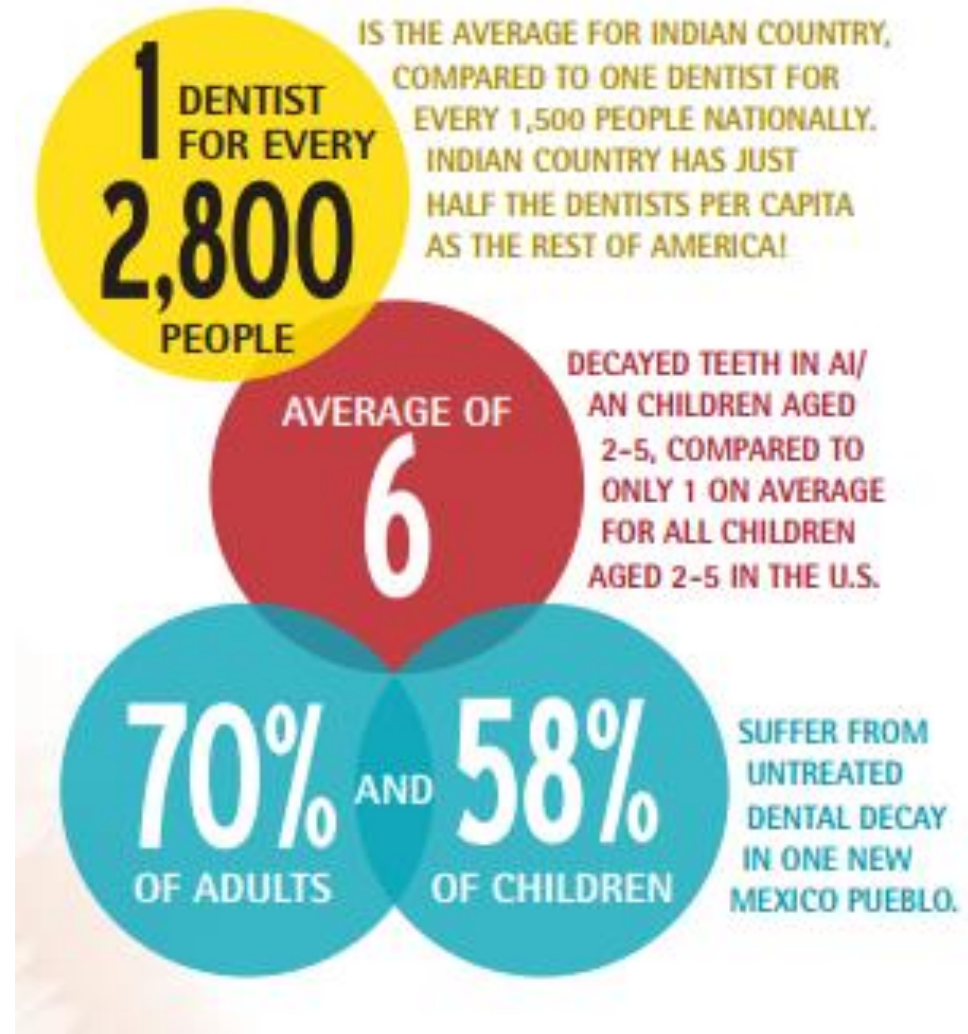
- Midlevel, focused providers
 - NPs and PAs of dentistry
- Dentists can do ~500 procedures
 - DTs can do ~50 procedures
- But those 50 are the most commonly needed
 - Meets between half and two thirds of patient need
 - DTs focus on preventative and restorative services
- Under supervision of dentists, dental therapists can practice in remote settings with need for additional provider capacity
- Evidence shows care provided by dental therapists is high quality, cost effective & safe





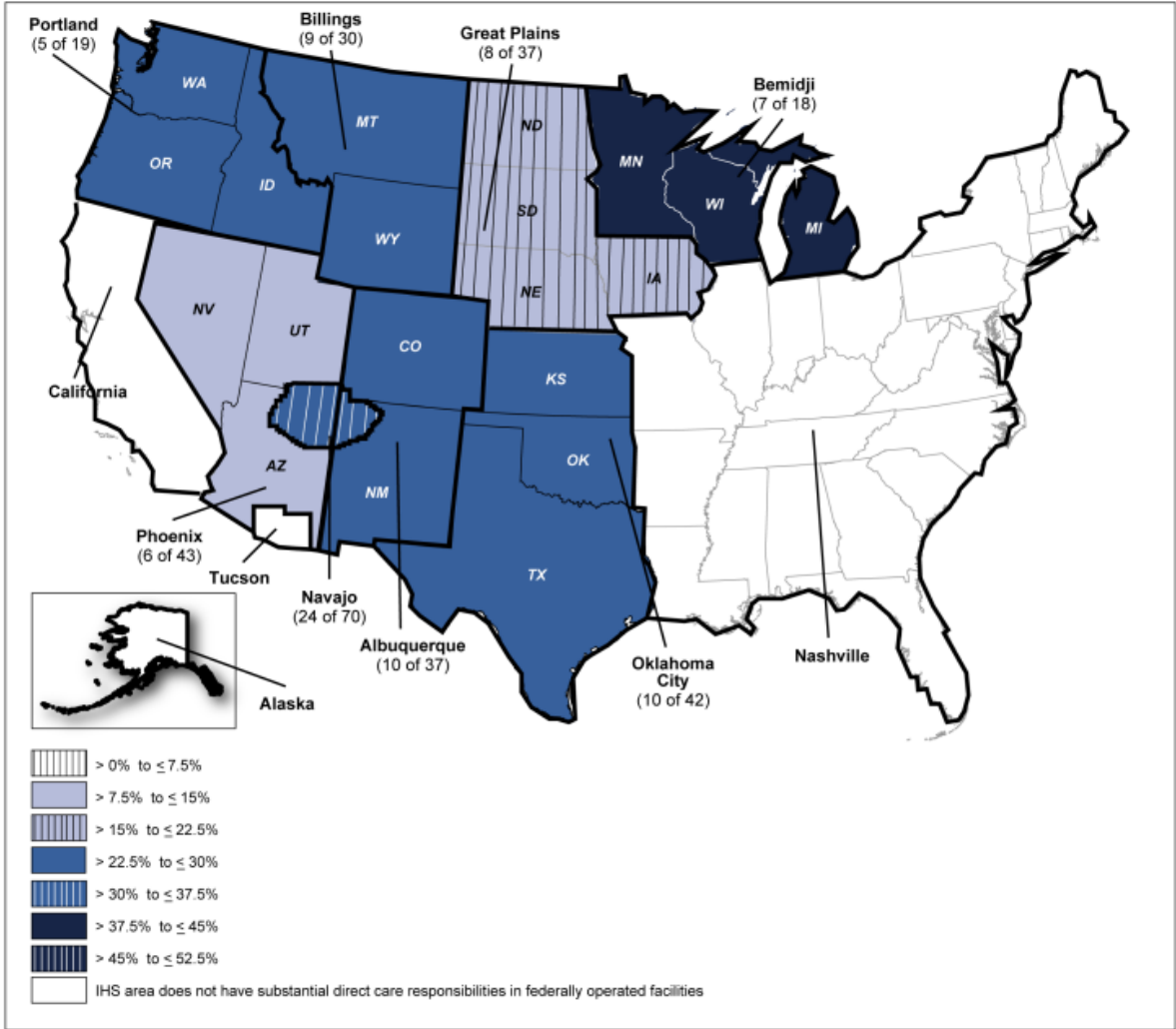
Oral Health Crisis in American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Communities

- AI/AN children are 5x more likely than average to have untreated cavities in permanent teeth
- 46% of AI/AN adults age 65+ had untreated dental caries
 - Compared to 19% of non-Native adults age 65+
- Lack of oral health care services in Tribal communities has impacted generations!



Oral Health Provider Shortage in Indian Health System

Figure 9: Dentist Vacancy Rates in the Eight Indian Health Service (IHS) Areas with Substantial Direct Care Responsibilities, November 2017



How Dental Therapists Fit in a Tribal Oral Health Team

- CHR/DHAs under CHAP help patients navigate system and access care
- CDHCs do education and outreach
 - Some can do limited preventive work
- Hygienists focus on prevention
- Dental Therapists see preventative and common restorative cases in a variety of settings
- Dentists can devote time to complex cases in clinic
- **Each role is important!**



Growing Our Own

- Alaska Dental Therapy Education Program
 - More than 90% of students are AI/AN
 - Dentistry is disproportionately white
- Dental Therapy is an accessible profession with steady work
- Additional dental therapy programs are being developed in the Pacific Northwest & New England
- Tribal Colleges are looking at how to develop programs too



Dental Therapy at Swinomish

- Swinomish hired Dental Therapist in 2016
 - The Tribe created its own licensing board with processes and standards
 - Developing this process took years of sustained Administrative support
- Since then:
 - 20% increase in patients seen
 - Dentists doing almost 50% more crown, bridge, and partials
 - Dental therapy has brought in revenue to support the expansion of the Tribe's dental clinic



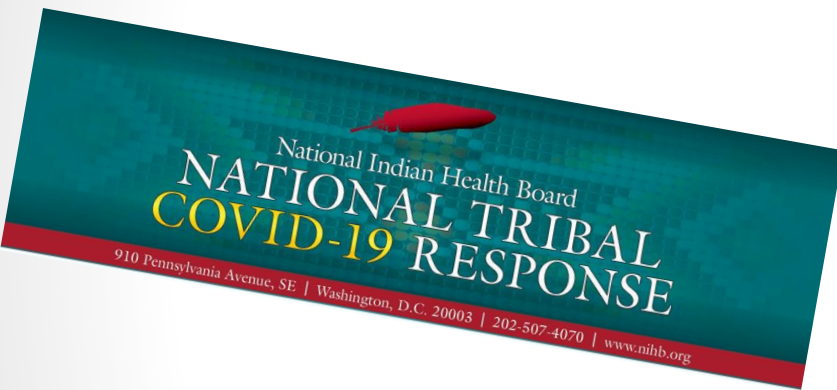
Other DT Tribes in the Pacific North West

- Port Gamble S'Klallam has a Dental Therapist since 2017
 - Washington State passed a dental therapy law in 2017
- In Oregon, Tribes are using Dental Therapists under a state pilot program
 - Dentists dedicate more time to treating complex needs
 - One Tribe added two chairs to its clinic to see more patients



Using Dental Therapists During a Global Pandemic

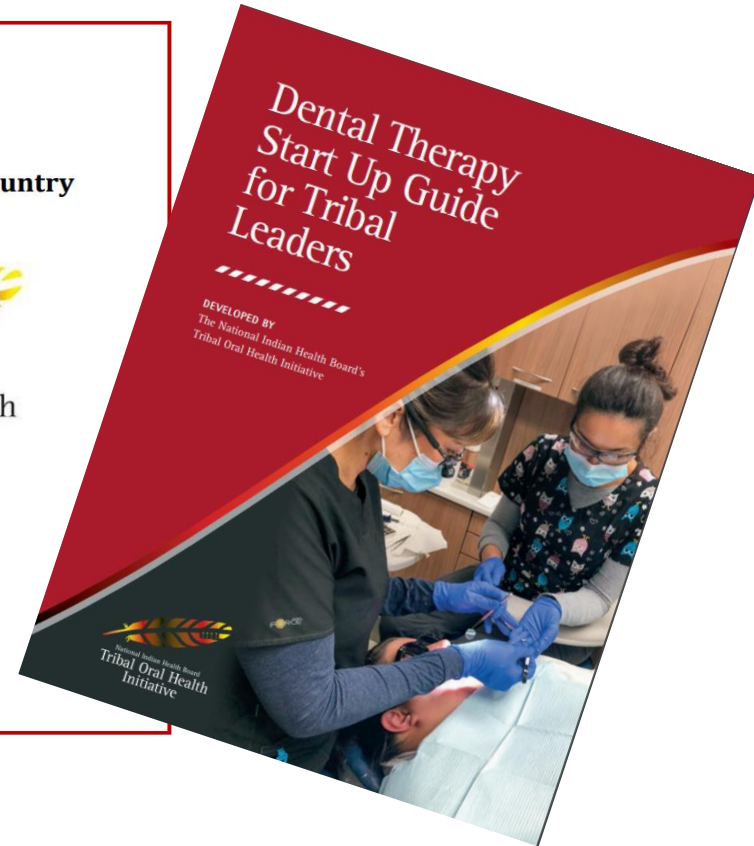
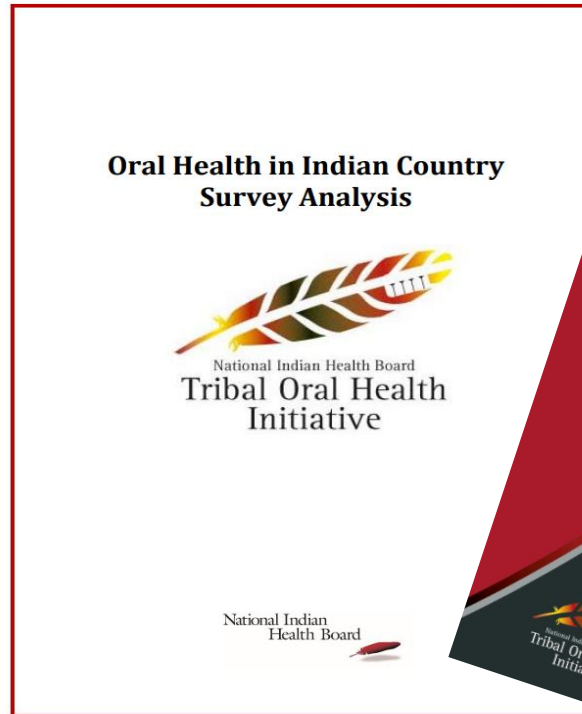
- IHS/Tribal dental systems open only for emergency cases
- Teledentistry helps reduce spread of COVID-19
 - Allows patients to receive care
- Lummi Nation
- Runners bring supplies to patients' home
- Dental providers walk patient through treatment plan
 - DTs scope of practice can be done virtually
- High patient satisfaction



Visit
<https://www.nihb.org/covid-19/> for more
information on how
Tribes are affected by
the pandemic



Resources for Getting Started at the Tribal Level

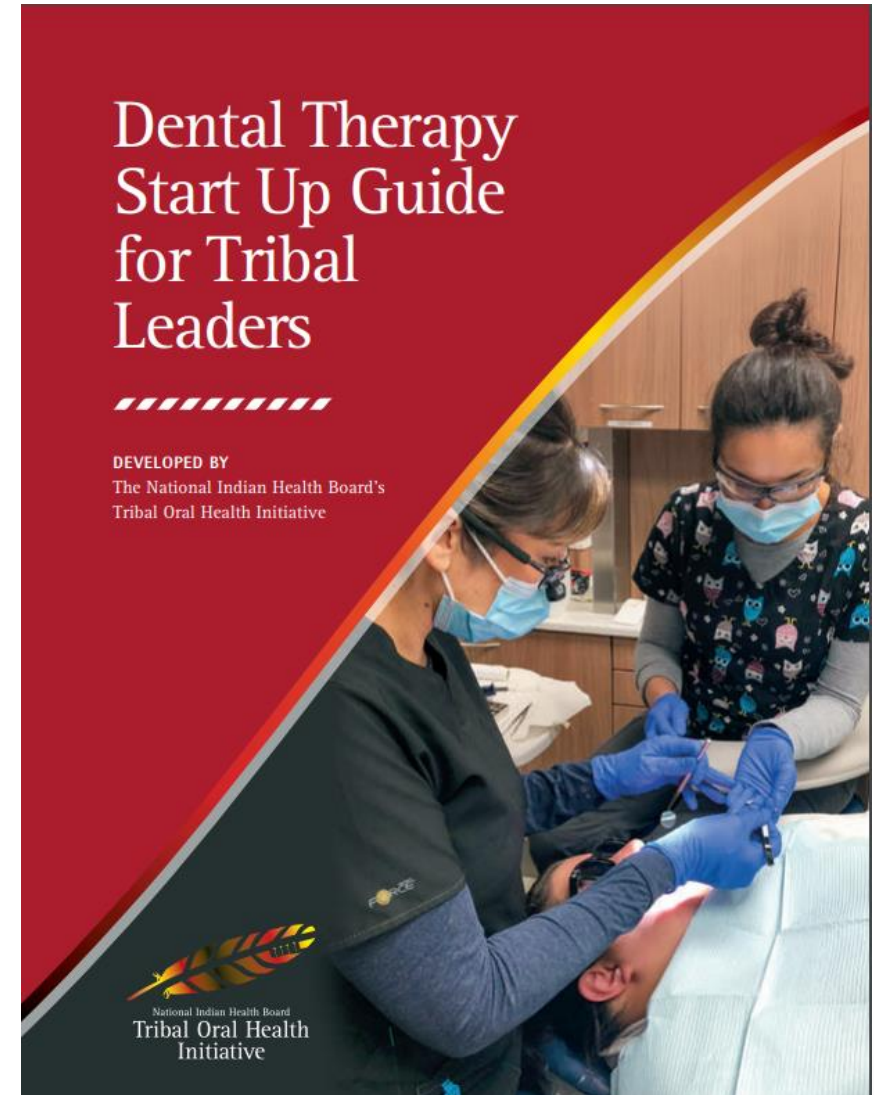


www.nihb.org/oralhealthinitiative



Start Up Guide for Tribal Leaders

- Created to make a very complex issue more digestible
- Includes concrete action steps Tribal leaders can take in their own communities
- Available on NIHB's website



Thank You!

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