



PROGRESSIVE Agenda

For States & Localities 2014

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Expand the Dental Workforce

Almost 47 million Americans live in areas with a shortage of dentists. This shortage is especially harmful for the 15 million children, mostly from low-income families, who go without annual dental visits leading to life-long dental problems.

The ratio of dentists to the general population is at its lowest in 100 years and the ratio is not expected to improve since the number of new dentists cannot keep pace with expected retirements in coming years.

States can expand dental services by increasing the workforce authorized to provide dental care. Primary care physicians can provide certain dental services by authorizing Medicaid to reimburse for dental care. Policies in Minnesota, Alaska and more than 50 countries have expanded the dental workforce by creating new intermediary positions between dental hygienists and dentists called dental therapists, analogous to nurse practitioners in the medical field. Minnesota's policy focuses on increasing dental care accessibility by requiring dental therapists to practice in rural and low-income communities where dentist shortages are most acute.

State

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Health Impact Assessments (HIA)

Too often, policy decisions are made without regard for the implications for the health of the community and its members. To avoid implementing policies or programs that negatively affect a population's health, city, state and local policymakers can initiate health impact assessments (HIAs) when contemplating policy changes. HIAs provide policymakers with comprehensive information about the potential health impacts of their decisions so that they are better informed when determining the best policy solution.

HIAs use a variety of survey methods and tools to engage experts and community stakeholders in gathering information about potential health effects of new policy proposals. Since HIAs engage community members, they can help build consensus on policy changes and create a more transparent and democratic decision-making process. Some states and localities initiate HIAs for specific projects; more progressive policies require HIAs as a standard part of the policymaking process.

State and local

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