

What is an RDHAP?

VMRC consumers now have access to a Registered Dental Hygienist in Alternative Practice (RDHAP) to provide quality oral health services.

What is an RDHAP?

In a nutshell it is a mid-level dental provider and is often equated to a Nurse Practitioner model in the medical world.

An RDHAP is an advanced dental hygiene provider who has undergone additional education and licensing through the state of California. They provide preventative oral health care to those with limited access to traditional dental care settings. Similar advanced practitioners are often referred to as “Dental Therapists” in other states however, Registered Dental Hygienist in Alternative Practice is the unique title used in California.

What can an RDHAP do?

A licensed RDHAP can provide dental hygiene care independently without a dentist but does have to provide the state with evidence of a consulting dentist. They can own their own mobile practice or open a brick-and-mortar practice anywhere that is considered to have a dental provider shortage. We have several pockets in the central valley that are designated as dental professional shortage areas.

The RDHAP can of course provide all the services an RDH would in a traditional setting which includes:

- Oral health assessments (i.e., kindergarten, caries risk, oral cancer screening, and others).
- Take and interpret x-rays.
- Record periodontal readings and treatment plan.
- Preventative dental cleanings.
- Fluoride varnish and other professional fluoride application.
- Root planing (deep cleaning), other periodontal therapies, and periodontal maintenance.
- Oral health, nutritional, and behavioral education/counseling.
- Small Fillings called Interim Therapeutic Restorations or ITR.
- Sealants.
- Application of medicaments to stop the process of dental decay.

An RDHAP consults with other dental and medical providers on their patients’ care as well as provides referrals.

Where can an RDHAP practice?

An RDHAP may deliver their services in various environments, including in the following locations:

- **All Types of Residential Care Facilities**
- Hospitals
- OB/GYN and Pediatric Medicine Offices

What is an RDHAP?

- Dental Clinics
- Community Centers
- Schools
- Their Own “Brick and Mortar” Practices
- Patient Homes
- Public Health Settings

For continued eligibility for RDHAP services after 18 months of care; California requires that a written prescription for services be obtained from a dentist or medical doctor.

Who Can an RDHAP Serve?

RDHAPs can only care for those who are considered part of a dentally underserved community within the state of California. These include people who cannot access care in a traditional dental office setting. These communities include:

- People who have illnesses or disabilities that make dental care more difficult or even impossible. People that an RDHAP can care for may be bedbound in their home, hospital, nursing, or other residential care facility. Additionally, patients who are medically fragile may have trouble finding an office that will provide their dental care. RDHAPs are also excellent for people who have dental phobia due to adverse dental experiences!
- RDHAPs can go into rural areas with little to no dental care facilities or can see people who cannot afford to go into a dental office.
- RDHAPs become Medi-Cal Dental providers because so many who have this coverage are not able to utilize it due to a shortage of dental offices that accept public insurance options.

Why are RDHAPs Important?

According to the [California Dental Association](#) (CDA), millions of California residents go without the oral healthcare they need because of access to care barriers. In a 2009, a survey discussed by the National Governors’ Association (NGA), revealed California RDHAPs reported that two thirds of their patients had no other source of oral health care at all.

Poor oral health is associated with adverse systemic outcomes and underserved populations are disproportionately affected. RDHAPs help to improve the oral and systemic health of people who are part of these vulnerable communities.