

Changes in Dental Hygiene Scope of Practice by State Between 2019 and 2024

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Oral Health Workforce Research Center

The mission of the Oral Health Workforce Research Center (OHWRC) is to provide accurate and policy-relevant research on the impact of the oral health workforce on oral health outcomes.

The research conducted by OHWRC informs strategies designed to increase access to oral health services for vulnerable populations.

OHWRC is based at the Center for Health Workforce Studies (CHWS) at the College of Integrated Health Sciences, University at Albany, State University of New York, and is the only federally-funded research center with a unique focus on the oral health workforce.

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Dental Hygiene Scope of Practice

- In the US, state-based laws and regulations define legal scope of practice (SOP) for dental hygienists (DHs)
- These determine which treatments and procedures DHs may perform in certain settings as well as those that can only be performed by a dentist
- They also determine the supervision level required to perform certain procedures
- Research indicates that a broader SOP for DHs improves access to oral healthcare, increases utilization, and improves outcomes¹⁻³

Objectives

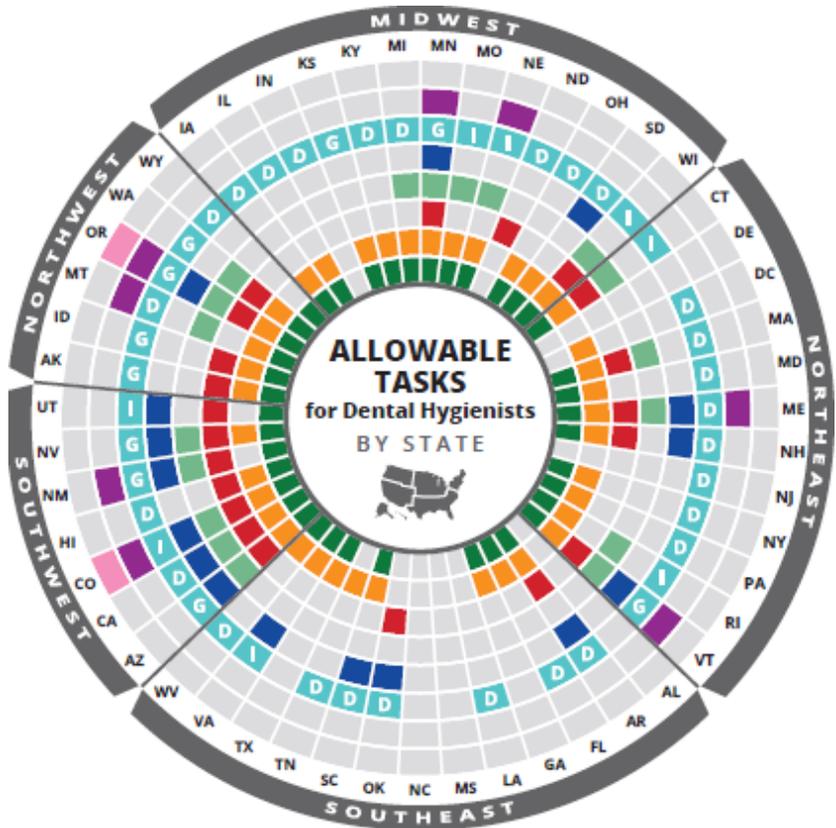
- Original 'Variation in Dental Hygiene Scope of Practice by State' infographic developed in 2017 to inform policy-relevant action
- Updated in 2019
- Objectives:
 - Review current laws and regulations defining SOP for DHs
 - Update the 2019 infographic
 - Highlight changes to the regulatory landscape

Methods

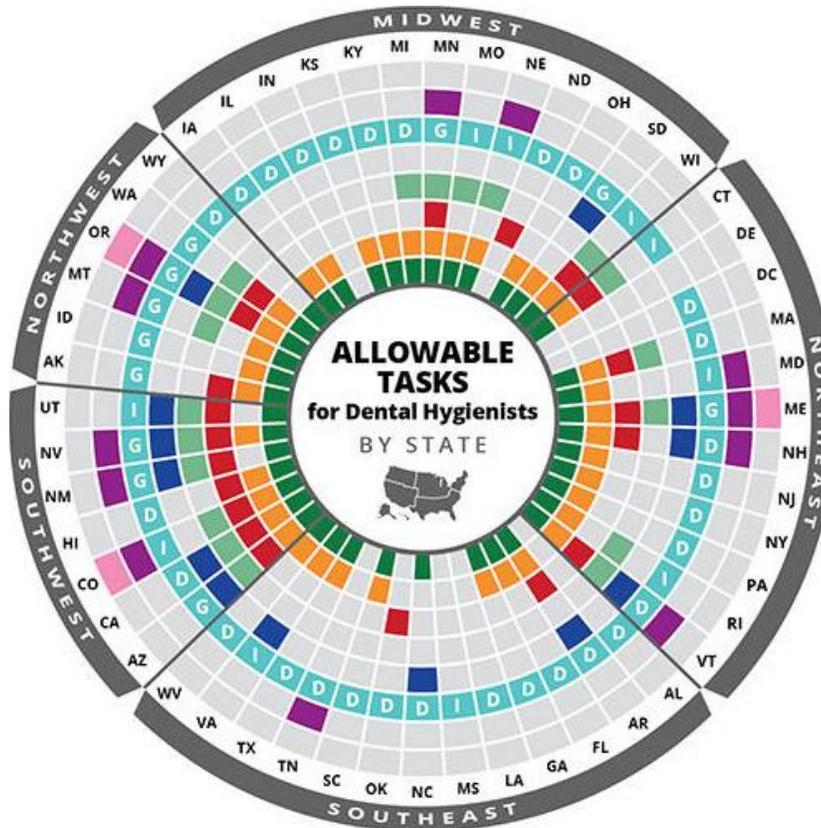
- Researchers independently examined state-level laws and regulations describing the legal SOP for DHs across all 50 states and the District of Columbia (DC)
 - Review of the Dental Practice Act and/or the Administrative Code
 - For each variable, determined the highest level of practice available to a DH
- Findings compared to regulatory overviews conducted by the American Dental Hygiene Association in 2023
- Outreach to various state dental hygiene associations to verify findings

DH SOP Infographics: 2019 and 2024

2019



2024

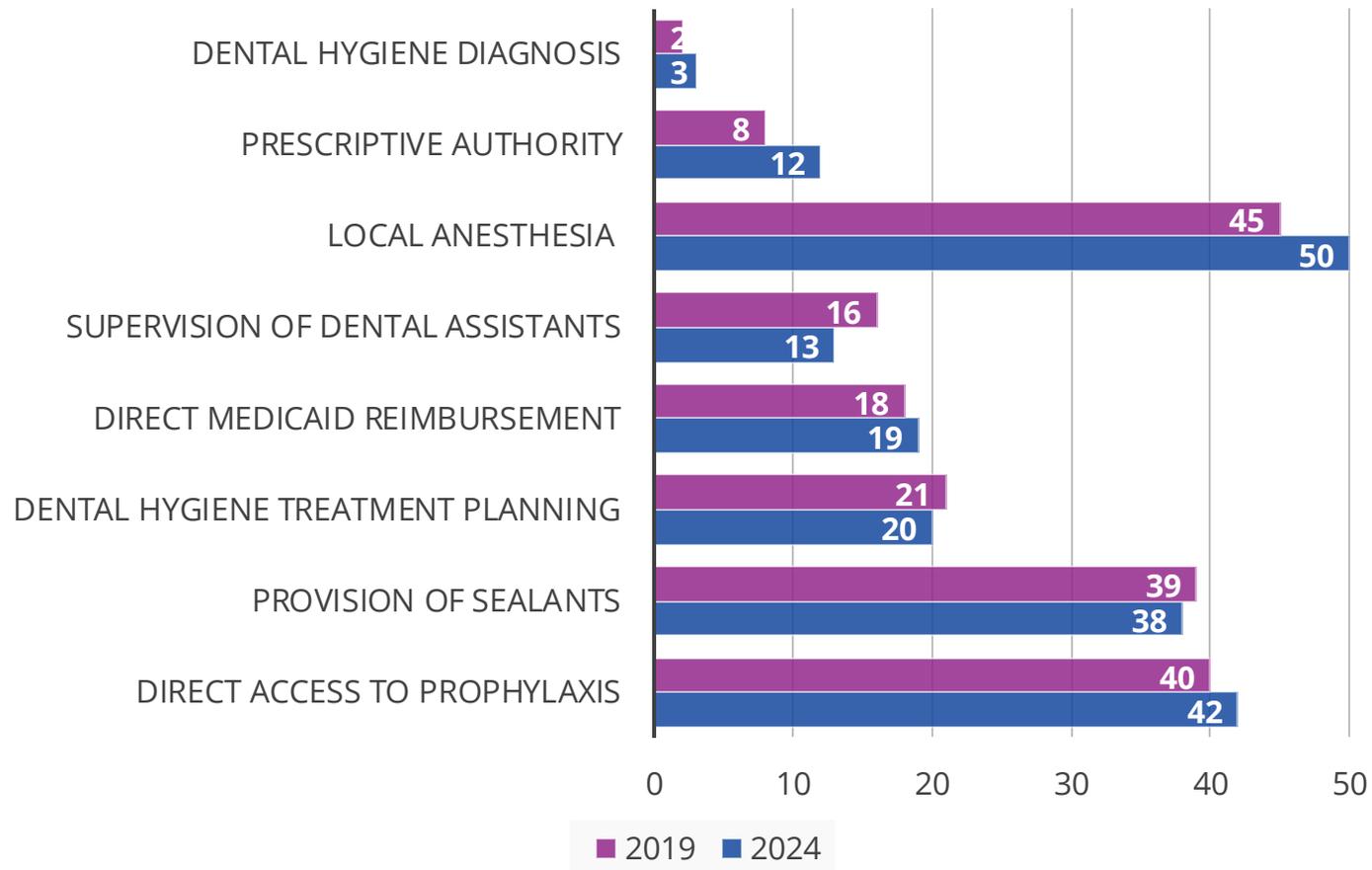


Key Variables

- Dental Hygiene Diagnosis
- Prescriptive Authority
- Local Anesthesia
- D Direct I Indirect G General
- Supervision of Dental Assistants
- Direct Medicaid Reimbursement
- Dental Hygiene Treatment Planning
- Provision of Sealants
- Direct Access to Prophylaxis
- Not Allowed / No Law

Major Shifts: 2019-2024

Number of States by Key Variable



- 5 additional states allow DHs to administer local anesthesia
- 4 additional states allow DHs to prescribe, administer, and dispense fluoride, topical medications, and chlorohexidine
- 2 additional states allow direct access to prophylaxis

Limitations

- Not all state dental hygienist associations responded to outreach
- Certain procedures that are permissible may not be captured in the law/regulation
- Regulations continue to evolve and may have shifted between now and the time this infographic was produced
- Variation of definitions and other nuances between states
- Keeping track of shifting regulatory landscape remains challenging and labor-intensive

Future Research

- Monitoring the use of the 2024 DH SOP infographic
 - Collaborate with the American Dental Hygienists' Association and other organizations to identify policy changes and how the infographic was used to inform those changes
 - Outreach to key stakeholders to inform further updates to the infographic
- Updating the 2016 Dental Hygiene Professional Practice Index (DHPPI) for 2025
 - Working with American Dental Hygienists' Association to conduct focus groups and key informant interviews with providers in community-based settings
 - Update key variables and weights used to measure DH SOP
 - Use updated DHPPI to quantify DH SOP in each state and compare to previous results from 2016 and 2014

References

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Questions?

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