NNOHA Position Statement on New Dental Workforce Models

Health Centers provide oral health services for underserved populations at dental clinics throughout the United States. Between 1998 and 2008, the number of Health Centers offering on-site dental services increased from 411 to 850, and the number of dental patients went up by 158%. As dental capacity grows, the need for a dental workforce committed to caring for underserved patients is growing as well.

Given the growing demand, new types of dental providers such as dental health therapists and advanced dental hygiene practitioners – sometimes called mid-level providers – have been proposed as a way to strengthen the dental safety net and to address unmet needs for dental services. If successful, such programs can not only facilitate a division of labor that allows dentists to manage and treat more acute and complex issues, but also contribute to primary prevention of severe and expensive problems.

NNOHA expresses its position on new dental workforce models as follows:

- **NNOHA supports access to high quality oral health services.** NNOHA welcomes initiatives that help to improve the oral health status of the underserved, which is the mission of our organization. We believe that everyone should have access to quality care, regardless of his or her ability to pay.

- **NNOHA supports development and implementation of pilot dental workforce programs,** including, but not limited to, Dental Therapists, Community Dental Health Coordinators, Oral Preventive Assistants, and Advanced Dental Hygiene Practitioners. Several programs are currently in development and should be supported to determine if they can be successful.

- **NNOHA wants to see evaluation and ongoing monitoring of new dental workforce models.** To provide high quality services, comprehensive evaluation and ongoing monitoring of new dental workforce models are needed. We believe that new types of dental providers should go through performance evaluation, certification and other procedures to ensure that their experience and skills are sufficient to treat patients with complicated oral health problems, which are often seen at Health Centers.

- **NNOHA supports new dental workforce models working in partnership and collaboration with dentists and other medical providers.** New dental workforce models should complement the work of conventional dental providers, such as dentists and dental hygienists, rather than replace them. It is important to NNOHA that any new types of dental providers do not work in isolation and that they perform their tasks within an established system of supervision.

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1 Health Resources and Services Administration – National UDS Data.