

## Networks for Oral Health Integration Within the Maternal and Child Health Safety Net

# Arizona



## Environmental Scan Results 2023

### Executive Summary

This Environmental Scan seeks to understand the baseline facilitators and barriers to integrating oral health into primary care for pregnant people and children in Arizona. The information summarized here was compiled from key stakeholders (primary care and health professional associations) and state and federal agencies (HRSA, Medicaid, public health, etc.).

Following the 2020 Census, Arizona was the 14th most populated state in the nation. In 2014, Arizona expanded Medicaid eligibility rules, which has led to increased enrollment for the eligible population. Innovations in Arizona include training community health workers to conduct oral health screenings and passing legislation to allow licensed dental therapists to practice in certain public health settings.

There are [23](#) federally qualified health centers providing care to [~817,026](#) patients annually at 212 delivery sites around the state. Twenty nine percent ([29%](#)) of [health center patients](#) are children. As of 2022, [5%](#) of children nationwide were uninsured, while [8.5%](#) of Arizona children lacked health insurance. Nearly [13.6%](#) of women of childbearing age and 16% of Arizona health center patients were uninsured. Arizona ranks close to last -- [#42 out of 51](#)-- on access to and affordability of health care.

Health disparities correlate with income, race, and the distribution of human and physical resources. Arizona residents who are underserved face multiple barriers to oral disease prevention and treatment. These results specifically describe oral health services available to children and pregnant people in the community health center primary care setting.

### Fluoride Varnish Application

- Primary care providers are permitted to apply fluoride varnish and be reimbursed by Medicaid every 3 months for children 6 months up to age 5 years as part of an EPSDT visit.
- In federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), fluoride varnish application is reimbursed as part of the well-child visit. While Arizona Medicaid provides reimbursement for fluoride varnish application separately from the EPSDT well-child visit, FQHCs' prospective payment system does not reimburse fluoride varnish application separately from a well-child visit.

- Delegation of fluoride varnish application to advanced practice, registered, or licensed practical nurses is permitted in the nursing practice act.
- Non-dental providers applying fluoride varnish are required to complete an oral health training course (Smiles for Life) and submit proof of completion to Medicaid. They are not required to use specific risk assessment or educational tools.
- Non-dental providers should bill the CPT 99188 code for fluoride varnish application.

### Fluoride Varnish Billing

Physicians are the only non-dental providers in Arizona who can bill and be reimbursed for fluoride varnish application.

## Dental Hygienist, Therapist & Assistant Scope of Practice

- Dental hygienists have a direct access option if they have had an active license for 3 years with a minimum of 500 hours in each of the last 2 years. Direct access, also called affiliated practice in Arizona, means dental hygienists that seek this certification can bill independently and can be reimbursed by Medicaid directly.
- Dental therapists can practice only in specific locations (FQHCs, community health centers (CHCs), nonprofit dental practices, and private dental practices with patients referred by a CHC).
- Dental assistants can apply fluoride varnish but cannot perform a caries risk assessment.

## Teledentistry

- Before the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE), dental hygienists were using teledentistry (store and forward information to a remote dentist), and Medicaid reimbursed for teledentistry for all EPSDT-eligible recipients.
- During the PHE, dentists could bill synchronous teledentistry visits at parity with in-person visits.
- At the end of the PHE, Medicaid reimbursed for asynchronous and synchronous teledentistry. Scope of service via teledentistry is limited to problem-focused exams and radiographs. Periodic and comprehensive oral evaluations via teledentistry are not reimbursed in Arizona.

## Community Water Fluoridation

- As of 2020, 58% of the population was on community water systems receiving fluoridated water, which is below the national average of 73%.

## Strengths

- Dental hygienists can supervise dental assistants and have a broad scope of practice.
- Dental hygienists in an affiliated practice agreement with a dentist who is a Medicaid provider are reimbursed by Medicaid for services cited in the practice agreement.
- Dental therapists are permitted and compensated for an oral health risk assessment and fluoride application.
- Medicaid reimburses for three different patient visits (e.g., behavioral, dental, medical) in a day.

## Opportunities

- Expand the settings in which direct access dental hygienists and dental therapists can practice and give them the ability to bill Medicaid directly.

- Allow midwives to provide preventive dental services.
- Allow medical providers to delegate the application of fluoride to medical assistants.
- Establish a mechanism for payment to medical professionals applying silver diamine fluoride (Code 0792T).
- Provide a Medicaid dental benefit for adult pregnant and postpartum women. The only coverage currently available to adult pregnant women is for emergency care and is limited to \$1,000 per year.
- Expand Medicaid to include an adult dental benefit for “preventive and comprehensive” care. The only coverage currently available to adults is emergency care and is limited to \$1,000 per year.
- Establish a mechanism for payment to medical professionals applying silver diamine fluoride (Code 0792T).

## Resources

- [2020 Allowable and Prohibited Duties for Dental Assistants: Arizona](#)
- [32-1276-04. Dental Therapists; Clinical Practice; Supervising Dentists; Written Practice Collaborative Practice Agreements](#)
- [AHCCCS Fee-for-Service Schedules](#)
- [Finding the Keys to Arizona's Oral Health Issues](#)
- [Dental Hygiene Scope of Practice](#)
- [Authorization Status of Dental Therapists](#)
- [Variation in Dental Hygiene Scope of Practice by State](#)
- [Smiles for Life: A National Oral Health Curriculum](#)

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## NOHI Project

To learn more about the NOHI project, please visit [www.mchoralhealth.org/pdfs/nohi-overview-profiles.pdf](http://www.mchoralhealth.org/pdfs/nohi-overview-profiles.pdf)

## Disclaimer

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