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For Immediate Release

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### **WPHCA Support for Dental Therapy**

Madison, WI - The Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association (WPHCA) is pleased to support LRB-1947, which provides for the licensure of dental therapists in Wisconsin as one way of improving access to oral health care in Wisconsin. WPHCA is the member association for Wisconsin's 17 Community Health Centers which provide oral health, primary care, and behavioral health services to over 300,000 Wisconsinites each year.

“We saw improved access across the bridge in Duluth when we added dental therapists to our practice. For example, our wait times for restorative care went down from 36 weeks on average to 6 weeks,” said Cheryl Larsen, Operations Director at [Lake Superior Community Health Center](#). Lake Superior has sites in both Superior, WI and Duluth, MN where dental therapists have been included in the practice since 2014. “We also complete treatment plans faster, which allows us to see new patients, when dental therapists are involved.”

Dr. Tina Sopiwnik, DMD, noted, “Wisconsin is near last in terms of oral health access for kids. As we have seen from our neighbors in Minnesota, dental therapy is one proven way we can help take care of more families.” Dr. Sopiwnik is a dentist at [NorthLakes Community Clinic](#) and the Steering Committee Chair for the [Wisconsin Oral Health Coalition](#), a group focused on improving the oral health and access to care across Wisconsin. NorthLakes Community Clinic saw over 8,000 dental patients in the last reporting year.

“Access to oral health care has always been a top priority for Community Health Centers,” said Stephanie Harrison, CEO of WPHCA. “We believe trained, licensed dental therapists will be a valuable addition to Health Centers to help increase access, particularly in low-income communities. Including them as part of the overall dental team will allow Health Centers to provide additional cost-effective and routine restorative care & shorten wait time for patients in need of those services, all while freeing up time for dentists to support patients with more

complex needs. We are grateful for Representative Felzkowski & Senator Craig's leadership on this issue.”

Community Health Centers continue to be committed to increasing access to oral health care in Wisconsin. Health Centers serve over 300,000 and provide oral health care to over 161,000 patients. Health Centers have tripled their dental capacity in the past ten years. Approximately 60% of patients served by Community Health Centers are Medicaid enrollees. Learn more about how Community Health Centers are [breaking down barriers to oral health care in Wisconsin](#).

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