



# Arkansas Department of Health

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## **PROPOSED RULES FOR DENTAL HYGIENISTS SERVING UNDERSERVED AREAS**

### **PURPOSE**

The Arkansas Department of Health (Department) is seeking review and approval of proposed amendments to the Rules Pertaining to Dental Hygienists Serving Underserved Areas. These proposed amendments remove barriers to using Dental Hygiene Collaborative Care permits in public settings, specifically public schools, and allow the use of a broad range of oral and public health data to assess a community's need priority in relation to the provider's service area. Proposed rule changes also protect and preserve any existing provider/patient relationships by eliminating a rule that required yearly patient assessment by the DHCC provider.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Department of Health is tasked with prioritizing the communities in which a dental hygienist may practice under a Dental Hygiene Collaborative Care permit. Existing rules specify the Arkansas Department of Health, Office of Oral Health shall develop and maintain a list of communities and/or rural areas prioritized as to need for dental services and will endeavor to direct collaborative services to these communities and rural areas. [...] Schools shall be prioritized utilizing the following criteria: (1) Low full-time dentist-to-population ratio; and (2) Percentage of students participating in free and reduced lunches of the school or school district." Schools are currently stratified across six (6) tiers categorized by percentage of the student population participating in Free and Reduced Meals (FARM). The school tier stratification has created an unforeseen barrier to providing care in public school communities that may not meet school or district level FARM criteria but still have high need for dental care. Basic Screening Survey data indicates key oral health indicators, such as decay experience and untreated decay, are consistent across tier levels. This finding suggests that a wider range of oral and public health data should be assessed when determining a community's need for oral health services.

### **PROPOSED RULES**

The proposed rule removes the school tier system and the provision for annual referral to the collaborative dentist. The proposed rule incorporates prioritization of communities based on provider availability and service area, relevant oral health surveillance data, and other applicable public health datasets deemed appropriate by the Office of Oral Health.

The proposed rule establishes prioritization, pursuant to Ark. Code Ann. §17-82-706.