



**CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF
COOS, LOWER UMPQUA AND SIUSLAW INDIANS
TRIBAL GOVERNMENT**

1245 Fulton Avenue - Coos Bay, OR 97420

Telephone: (541)888-9577 Toll Free 1-888-280-0726 Fax: (541)888-2853

January 29, 2020

Dear Legislator:

I am writing today on behalf of the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua & Siuslaw Indians Tribal Council and ask that you stand with us in fully recognizing our rights and responsibilities to care for our Tribal members with high quality and culturally relevant oral health services by supporting Senate Bill 1549, authorizing dental therapists as licensed providers in Oregon.

The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians (CTCLUSI) consists of three Tribes (four bands): two bands of Coos Tribes (Hanis Coos and Miluk Coos), the Lower Umpqua Tribe, and the Siuslaw Tribe. Our ancestors were the aboriginal inhabitants of the South-Central Oregon Coast. Our ancestral homelands extended from the forested slopes of Coastal Range in the east to the rocky shoreline of the Pacific Ocean, a vast region of 1.6 million acres. We have been here since time immemorial. Our ancestors lived and flourished in the lush forests, the sandy beaches, and the estuaries of the major rivers in the area. Today, our Tribal population of more than 1,200 Tribal members is dispersed throughout the United States and the world; however, more than 685 of our people live in Oregon.

Our tribal dental clinic opened in 2000. It serves American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) people from our Tribe, the Coquille Indian Tribe, and other AI/AN people who are members or descendants of federally recognized Tribes. On average, we see 752 patients each year. Of that number, 166 are CTCLUSI members/family, 125 are CIT members/family, and 363 are other AI/AN. We see patients of all ages, including 179 children and 237 Tribal Elders (55+ years). Our clinic is the only Tribal dental clinic on the Oregon Coast between Siletz and the Northern California state line.

Prior to the establishment of our dental clinic, many of our adults and Elders lost teeth and suffered great pain because of poor and/or unavailable dental care. Since then we have worked hard to tackle the oral health crisis in the AI/AN community. However, it is difficult to recruit and retain qualified, skilled staff for our dental program. In the past six years we have had three different dentists. Each time a dentist left, it took 5-6 months to recruit for and hire a new dentist.

January 29, 2020

Our community struggles with lack of access to care for many reasons, including the cost of dental care, the lack of insurance and alternate resources, and the limited number of providers in our more rural counties. Our clinic is a safety-net clinic for our community and provides necessary care for AI/AN people who live and work here. Although 35-40% of our Tribal members and patients are on the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), wait times to see a non-Tribal OHP provider can be prohibitive. We are a Medicaid provider, which helps to alleviate the problem, but our own wait times can be long, at times, for non-emergent care.

Oral health is essential to overall health, and we cannot have healthy communities without access to reliable, high quality, affordable dental care. We have worked closely with the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB) for the last twenty-two years to create health programs that have improved the overall health of our Tribe and efficiency of our health care system. NPAIHB has a long-standing history of working closely with tribal communities to improve health care outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Natives and the health programs that serve them.

Dental therapy is an evidence-based, culturally relevant oral health care model brought to the United States 15 years ago by Alaska Natives seeking to reverse their oral disease epidemic in a more cost-effective manner. Practiced in over 50 countries, the profession continues to demonstrate its safety and effectiveness by:

- improving the patient experience of care;
- increasing and improving access and outcomes;
- building an oral health workforce with providers recruited from and returning to their communities, and;
- reducing the cost of care.

In Oregon, the Tribal Dental Health Aide Therapy Pilot Project, approved by the state in 2016, is showing that dental therapy meets the goals of Senate Bill 738: to develop innovative practices in oral health care delivery systems with a focus on providing care to populations that evidence-based studies have shown have the highest disease rates and the least access to dental care. CTCLUSI was the first Tribe in Oregon to send a Tribal member to Alaska for training as a dental therapist; we have since trained a second dental therapist. We were also the first clinic approved for the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) dental pilot projects – our dental therapy initiative is OHA Pilot Project #100. In the first two years of the project, we have achieved improvements in patient access to oral care. Now in Year 2 of the project, the number of patients seen in our clinic has increased 9% from baseline and our average wait times to see the dentist for a comprehensive evaluation have dropped from 10 weeks to 6 weeks. We are completing a physical expansion of our dental clinic, which will increase the number of operatories from three to seven to accommodate our expanded dental team and further improve access to oral health care in Southern Oregon.

January 29, 2020

We are collaborating with healthcare providers, oral health professional associations, community-based organizations and oral health educators across the state to support a policy that is informed by other state and Tribal efforts that precede this bill. To that end, we are committed to policy that ensures the following outcomes:

- Use of Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) standards as the measure of qualified dental therapy education programs. This allows for accessible education pathways for non-traditional students from underrepresented communities;
- Recognition of Tribal Sovereignty;
- General supervision for the full scope of dental therapy to achieve maximum benefits to patients, clinics and providers, and;
- A pathway to licensure for Oregon Pilot Project dental therapists that does not interrupt services currently being provided.

The Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua & Siuslaw Indians is committed to eliminating health disparities and improving oral health care for AI/AN people living in Oregon. We feel strongly that the use of dental therapists in our clinic is the best way to deliver high quality, culturally appropriate, and cost-effective oral health care to our people. We strongly support Senate Bill 1549 and we urge you to join us in that support. If you have any questions or would like to discuss this with me, please feel free to call me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexis Barry', written in a cursive style.

Alexis Barry
Chief Executive Officer