



Senate Majority Policy Committee Hearing – Rural Dental Care

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Community Colleges play an important role in helping to address the challenges of rural dental health. By providing affordable and accessible education, Community Colleges assist in filling the workforce gap for dental services.

It is well documented that preventive care of teeth and gums plays a role in the quality of life and the overall health benefit in controlling heart disease and diabetes, which we see are significant health concerns in the state of Pennsylvania. There is the additional burden of medical expenses for these chronic diseases and the American Diabetes Association reports that medical costs are 2.6 times higher for this population.

Lehigh Carbon Community College offers a Dental Hygiene Associates Degree in Applied Science in cooperation with Montgomery County Community College. The Dental Hygiene Associate Degree Program prepares the student to work as a dental hygienist in a variety of settings and provides education in preventative and therapeutic oral care. Students can take 30 credits of prerequisite work at Lehigh Carbon Community College and then apply to the Dental Hygiene Program at Montgomery community College, where they take extensive, hands-on training at the state-of-the-art Health Sciences Center in its dental hygiene clinic. They also gain clinical experience at community-based sites.

The Dental Hygiene Associate Degree program, through an agreement with Montgomery County Community College, is accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation.

LCCC offers a successful Dual Enrollment Program for High School students where students receive a reduced tuition rate, with the credits applying to LCCC program and transferring to other colleges and universities.

Improving and Expanding Access and Care:

- Funding for programs to introduce students in high school/college to the dental profession. Encouraging students from the rural communities to consider dental careers and connect their talent to a career pathway. It is well documented that a “home-grown workforce” is committed to their hometowns and this workforce shows increased loyalty and dedication, reduced turnover and contributes to the overall economic growth in the community. This funding would provide students from all backgrounds with information and access to education.

- Increase incentives for students and providers.
Funds appropriated to purchase:
 - mobile clinics for learning institutions and patient care institutions
 - tele dentistry with portable equipment
 - student scholarships
 - loan repayment assistance

- Increase funding for rural patient clinics to provide primary and preventive dental services at no charge. Students could train and assist with these services.

- Supporting Providers to work at the top of their license, such as an expanded functions dental assistants.

- Funding for Dental Education programs to support student interns.