



## Health Action New Mexico News Release

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### **Legislation to Improve Access to Dental Care for All Passes House Floor**

**Santa Fe, NM – March 16, 2015** – House Bill 349 sponsored by Representative Dennis Roch (R-Logan), legislation that would increase access to affordable, quality dental care for all New Mexico communities, passed the House floor today. The bill has received bipartisan support in both chambers and will now head to the Senate.

“Today, my colleagues in the House joined me in taking a stand for improving the overall healthcare system for all communities—whether urban, rural, or tribal,” said Rep. Roch. “I thank them for standing with me and standing up for all who have suffered as a result of our state’s dental crisis. Thirty-two of our thirty-three counties are in dental shortage areas, and it only makes sense to address this issue head-on with a solution that not only provides a mid-level dental provider, but also provides jobs and education opportunities.”

HB 349 would allow for the education and licensure of dental therapists—a mid-level dental care provider—in New Mexico. Practicing under the general, off-site supervision of a dentist, a dental therapist would be able to provide a limited scope of procedures, opening up dentists to practice more complex procedures. Additionally, a dental therapist would accept Medicaid—something a minuscule number of New Mexico dentists currently do.

“As we have said before, it is time to take on New Mexico’s dental crisis and provide a solution,” said Pamela Blackwell, HANM Dental Access Project Coordinator. “I extend my sincere gratitude to all the Representatives who voted in favor of this solution today and to all who have taken time out of their schedules throughout the course of this session to provide their support to this monumental legislation. Without a doubt, this is a solution that will greatly benefit the people of New Mexico who are badly in need of dental care.”

In addition to the votes on the House floor today, the bill has received bipartisan support in both chambers and has received outspoken support from many statewide, including statewide health advocates, community improvement advocates, dental hygienists, Dr. Patricio Larragoite (DDS), former NM Department of Health Secretary Alfredo Vigil, MD, Michael Bird, Chair of the Kewa Pueblo Health Corporation/Board, and a Past President of the American Public Health Association (APHA), and over 1,300 petition signers statewide.

The dental therapist model is being used in 52 countries worldwide and in the United States in Alaska, Minnesota, and Maine. HB 349 will now head to the Senate.

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