

Tribes are leading Oregon to better oral health

Pilot project approved by state will employ mid-level dental providers to improve care

COOS BAY, Ore. - The Coquille Tribe and the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians have received approval from the Oregon Health Authority for a pilot project to integrate mid-level dental providers into their health care systems.

The pilot will operate under an Oregon law approved in 2011 that promotes innovative and data-driven improvements to the state's oral health system.

Called dental health aide therapists (DHATs), these providers help expand high quality, cost-effective care to more people. They can perform preventive care and routine restorative duties, such as filling cavities.

Similar to physician assistants, they focus on a limited number of much-needed procedures and go through a rigorous educational program. They work under the supervision of a dentist and are re-certified every two years.

"Our intent is to increase access to care for our Tribal members. The rates of untreated tooth decay are four times higher nationally for Native preschool-aged children compared to their non-Native peers and those numbers are reflected here as well. That is unacceptable. We need to turn those numbers around and this [is] a step in the right direction," said Mark Ingersoll, chairman of the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians.

The Tribe's dental clinic cares largely for its own members, as well as members of other Tribes within the five-county service area. With one full-time dentist at the clinic, the need for more providers is acute.

The Tribe plans to hire an experienced DHAT this year to start providing services and has sent one of its members to the two-year Alaska DHAT Education program.

The Coquille Tribe also is recruiting a student from its community to receive DHAT training.

"This model of care really focuses on quality and the continuity of care that comes from training and hiring members of our own community. We know they are far more likely to stay here and be a part of our health care system, unlike the itinerant dentist model that is common in the Indian Health Service system," said Brenda Meade, chairperson of the Coquille Indian Tribe.

The Tribe is newly establishing an oral health component as part of its health care services.

"We are building from the ground up and having a DHAT as part of the team means we can serve more people with better care at lower costs. It just makes sense," said Meade.

The pilot would replicate what Alaska Natives did more than a decade ago by educating and hiring these providers to help their dentists extend care to more people.

The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC) reported in 2014 that its dental health aide therapists have



helped extend care to more than 40,000 Alaskans in rural communities.

In addition to expanding care to many who need it, this approach has brought jobs to Tribal communities in Alaska, economic growth to participating clinics and cost savings to patients who used to travel hundreds of miles to see a dentist for urgent and costly care.

The two Tribes are partnering for the pilot with the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board (NPAIHB), an organization that supports health promotion

and disease prevention for the 43 federally recognized Tribes of Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

"We know that many Oregonians struggle to get the dental care they need. But American Indians are among those who suffer the greatest oral health disparities because of access to care. That is why we are excited to bring a proven, innovative solution to Tribes in this state and, at the same time, demonstrate the benefits of this provider to all those in need," said Joe Finkbonner, NPAIHB executive director.



Whale Watch Week, Winter Discovery Series continue at Cape Perpetua

This spring's Whale Watch Week runs from March 19-26. More than 1,600 gray whale sightings were reported during this winter's Whale Watch Week as the whales traveled to their warm calving grounds off Baja California, Mexico.

The Cape Perpetua Winter Discovery Series is an opportunity to explore topics and resources relevant to the Oregon Coast during the off-season months between November and March. All presentations and guided walks are free, but a Northwest Forest Pass, Oregon Coast Passport, federal recreation pass or \$5 day-use fee is required within the Cape Perpetua Scenic Area.

Upcoming Winter Discovery Series events include:

- March 5 (1 p.m.) – The Amanda Story and Trail: Learn the tale behind the trail. Doc Slyter, an Elder, flutist and Tribal Council member for the Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians, along with Yachats resident and trails enthusiast Joanne Kittel will tell the story of a Native woman and her people's forced march over Cape Perpetua's rocky headland to a resettlement camp and the legacy they left behind.
- March 20 (2 p.m.) – Children's Stories and Tidepool Walk: Children's author Kizzie Jones will read from

- one of her latest books and then lead families down to the tide pools for a guided tour. Jones blends her love of dachshunds and the ocean to create whimsical tall tales. Titles to her credit include *How Dachshunds Came to Be: A Tall Tale About A Short Long Dog* and *A Tall Tale About A Dachshund And A Pelican: How A Friendship Came To Be*.
- March 21 (11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.) – Experiencing Gray Whales: Cape Perpetua volunteer interpreter and naturalist Michael Noack has studied gray whales for many years, assisting with whale research missions and training Whale Watch volunteers. Visitors will enjoy hearing about his

firsthand encounters with these iconic creatures of the Oregon Coast.

- March 26 (2 p.m.) – Oregon Dunes: They're more than just sand. Learn about the origins, shapes and future of the longest stretch of coastal dunes in the United States. Dina Pavlis, author of *Secrets of the Oregon Dunes*, will share photos, stories and knowledge gained from living and playing within the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area.

No RSVP is necessary for these events. For more information, call the Cape Perpetua Visitor Center at 541-547-3289.

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Play like an animal at the aquarium

NEWPORT, Ore. – With more than 15,000 animals on exhibit, the animal care experts at the Oregon Coast Aquarium have plenty of experience with keeping critters busy.

Attending to an animal's mental well-being is just as important as suitable housing, top-notch veterinary care and the best food available.

Staff at the aquarium meet this need by devising specialized items and experiences, called enrichment, that provide variation to the animals' routines and mimic challenges they would face in the wild without the risk of going hungry or facing predators.

Spring break visitors are invited to dive into the world of animal play on

Enrichment Day at the aquarium on March 22.

Aquarium staff will share their techniques and tools for keeping an ocean of animals entertained, including tips for creating animal enrichment for pets at home.

The aquarium's animal enrichment program is supported, in part, by donations. To make a harbor seal's, shark's or tufted puffin's dreams come true, shop the Aquarium's animal enrichment wish list at bit.ly/enrichmentwishlist.

The Oregon Coast Aquarium is open every day this winter from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, visit aquarium.org or call 541-867-FISH.