

*More than 36,000 Georgia citizens cannot access dental offices because they are confined to nursing homes. Thousands more who are homebound or physically unable to travel cannot access dental care.*  
Across the States Profiles of Long Term Care: GA AARP Public Policy Institute 2004



## **ACCESS TO PREVENTIVE ORAL HEALTH CARE**

### **Why this legislation is important:**

The majority of Georgia's seniors and adults with special needs or developmental disabilities are suffering from an overwhelming level of untreated dental and periodontal (gum) disease. Life threatening illnesses, such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory diseases, diabetes and infective endocarditis may result from uncontrolled gum disease, recent studies indicate.

Although gum disease is highly preventable and controllable with regular professional dental hygiene care, older adults are often homebound or reside in personal care homes or nursing facilities and are unable to get to the dentist's office. This problem could be greatly remedied by permitting dental hygienists to provide preventive services to patients under "general supervision" of a dentist in alternative settings. Current Georgia law (direct supervision) requires the physical presence of a dentist when a dental hygienist performs basic routine oral health care procedures. General supervision does not require the authorizing dentist to be present. The direct supervision requirement is costly and limits the access of the elderly and others with disabilities to basic, necessary oral healthcare.

### **What other states do:**

"General supervision" is now allowed in 47 states. Forty three of these allow it in any permitted practice setting. The other four limit general supervision to certain alternative settings, allowing the provision of services to patients who otherwise experience a lack of access to oral health care. North Carolina became the most recent state in June 2007 to authorize general supervision in alternative settings only.

In each of these states, a dentist is permitted to authorize a dental hygienist to perform procedures in specific types of settings as established by law without the dentist being present during the performance of those procedures.

### **What this legislation would do:**

Allow dental hygienists, in cooperation with and under general supervision of dentists in accordance with procedures established by the Georgia Board of Dentistry, to provide basic preventive oral healthcare services in specific settings, identify patients who need more specialized services of dentists, and educate patients and caregivers about daily healthcare regimens.

***Coalition of Advocates for Georgia's Elderly (CO-AGE) 2008***