

For Immediate Release

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## **Port Gamble S’Klallam Becomes First Washington Tribe to Hire Dental Therapist After Passage of Groundbreaking Legislation**

*Passed in 2017, SB 5079 allows for use of dental therapists  
to provide preventative and restorative care in tribal settings*

Kingston, WA (*February 1, 2018*)—Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe (PGST) has become the first Washington state tribe to hire a Dental Therapist since passage of groundbreaking state legislation ([SB 5079](#)) to authorize dental therapists to practice on tribal lands, just one year ago. Rochelle Ferry, a dental therapist with eight years of experience working in Alaska, joins the team at the Port Gamble S’Klallam Dental clinic.

Dental therapists are primary care oral health providers who expand the capacity of dental teams by delivering a number of routine and preventive dental services, including fillings and simple extractions.

“Port Gamble S’Klallam Health Services is committed to providing excellent care, and the whole team is excited to bring this provider type to our clinic. The evidence is compelling. Tribal dental therapists are culturally relevant providers that improve access and clinic efficiency, offer an accessible health-profession role model to our youth, and most importantly, improve oral health,” said Karol Dixon, PGST Health Services Director.

In 2016, before the Washington state law was passed, the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community became the first tribe to hire and license a dental therapist.

As part of a tribally-driven solution, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium introduced the first successful dental therapist workforce in the United States over ten years ago. Since then, the program has expanded care to more than 45,000 Alaska Natives in dire need of consistent preventive and restorative care. [A recent study](#) conducted by Donald Chi, a public health dentist and associate professor at the University of Washington School of Dentistry also concluded that not only access, but positive oral health outcomes are associated with communities where dental therapists are practicing.

Recognizing this success, and honoring the sovereign rights and responsibility of tribes to provide the best health care possible for their communities, the state of Washington passed legislation last year with bi-partisan support to allow dental therapist to practice in tribal health settings. The legislation has impacted workforce development, with five students from Washington tribes currently attending the Alaska Dental Therapy Education Program and more

applying for future classes. Washington Tribes are also working with a local community college to build a DHAT training program in the state.

“As a sovereign nation, we have a responsibility to provide for our community members, and this includes ensuring they have access to the best possible health care options,” said PGST Chairman Jeromy Sullivan. “Dental Therapists are a solution brought forth by tribal leaders to address a shortage of qualified oral health care professionals, and the evidence of their success is clear, especially in providing culturally competent care in tribal communities. We are proud to be at the forefront of this movement in Washington state, and look forward to welcoming Rochelle to our community.”

The Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe is a proven leader in adopting innovative programs and solutions that provide turnkey, culturally-driven services to its members. For example, in 2008, PGST was the first tribe in the nation to begin governing its own Title IV-E program providing guardianship, foster care, and adoption assistance. More recently, PGST has been praised for their Re-Entry program, which provides healing, hope, and opportunities to those who have been incarcerated for crimes related to addiction. The program was awarded a prestigious Second Chance Act grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, and is being used as blueprint for tribal and county run programs throughout Washington state.

For more information about the Dental Therapy Health Initiative, please visit <http://www.npaihb.org/ndti/>.

### **ABOUT Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe**

The Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe, originally known as the Nux Sklai Yem or Strong People, are descendants of the Salish people who have been well-established in the Puget Sound basin and surrounding areas since 2400 B.C. In the late 1930s, the Port Gamble S’Klallam reservation, located on the northern tip of the Kitsap Peninsula in Washington State, was established. Many of the Tribe’s members, who total about twelve hundred, still live there today.

For more information about the S’Klallam Tribe, please visit [www.pgst.nsn.us](http://www.pgst.nsn.us).

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