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Senate Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services KDHE Budget February 9, 2023

Chair McGinn and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony for the Committee. My name is Tanya Dorf Brunner, and I am the Executive Director of Oral Health Kansas, Inc. We are the statewide advocacy organization dedicated to promoting the importance of lifelong dental health by shaping policy and educating the public, so Kansans know that all mouths matter.

Adult dental coverage

Last year this committee championed an important change by extending Medicaid dental benefits to adults for the first time in the state's history. The [new benefits went into effect July 1, 2022](#), and include fillings and crowns, periodontal care, and a non-invasive technique to stop cavities called Silver Diamine Fluoride. The benefit package for adults includes the managed care organizations' current coverage of exams, x-rays, and cleanings through their Value-Added Benefits (VABs). This makes Kansas unique, as few if any other states design an adult dental package that includes both state plan services and VAB services.

Oral Health Kansas continues working on [education for consumers and providers](#) about the new dental benefits. We created a short video announcing the benefits and just published a flier for consumers describing the benefits in both English and Spanish. We have been providing presentations and exhibits about the new dental benefit for our partners' conferences. We know a key to successful implementation is a great deal of consumer and provider education, and we thank you for the opportunity to lean into this education phase of implementation.

Denture coverage

After the legislature approved funding for the adult dental coverage last year, we had many conversations with stakeholders about what should be included in the benefit. We met with and surveyed 70 long-term care and 18 disabilities service providers/advocates. Dentures were tied with fillings as the highest rated area of need for adults who are covered by Medicaid. Those conversations made it clear that denture coverage in Medicaid is something that must be addressed quickly. Provider and consumer advocates report that access to dentures is spotty at best.

Health benefits

Nearly a third of older adults in Kansas have lost six or more teeth due to tooth decay or gum disease. Missing teeth leads to difficulty in eating and digesting food which can lead to nutritional deficiencies. Studies have shown people with missing teeth are more likely to experience health problems such as cardiovascular diseases, gastrointestinal disorders, and diabetes.

The adult dental benefit was based on research the American Dental Association's Health Policy Institute conducted for Kansas that showed over time the Kansas Medicaid program will save money in medical costs by covering dental care. The report specifically

described the savings that would come in care for people with heart disease and diabetes. Dentures and partials are one of the best ways for people who have lost some or all of their teeth to eat healthy foods and enhance their overall health.

Eating well is key to achieving diabetic control and therefore, a healthy diet can both increase health for the individual and reduce burgeoning healthcare costs by lowering the risk of costly diabetic complications. Further, the provision of dentures and partials is one of the best ways to help those who have lost natural teeth restore their ability to eat nutritious food and maintain a healthy diet. As of 2021, 11.4% of adult Kansans have been diagnosed with diabetes, amounting to an [estimated cost of \\$2.4 billion dollars annually](#) and, [according to the CDC](#), 61% of annual diabetic spending is for adults aged 65 or over. The high diabetic cost burden paired with high levels of significant tooth loss in this population highlights the need for the provision of a simple way to restore dentition and thus facilitate the maintenance of a healthy diet, namely dentures and partials.

A man named Hugo called our office asking for help. He was 65 and on Medicaid, and he told us he had been gluing his dentures together for the past five years. Hugo said they wouldn't stay together any longer, so he wanted help getting new dentures. After talking for a little while, we discovered he also had diabetes and couldn't keep his blood sugar under control because he couldn't eat healthy fruits and vegetables. Medicaid was his only source of health insurance, so denture coverage would have made all the difference in the world for Hugo.

Economic benefits

Dentures and partials are not only key to people's ability to eat healthy food and control chronic illnesses like diabetes, they also are key to people's ability to get and keep jobs. When people are unable to smile confidently because of missing teeth, it is hard for them to be employable.



[News articles](#) and the [experience of prosthodontists](#) (dentists who specialize in replacing teeth) tell us what we all know: people who do not have teeth become less employable. People may lose their confidence and stop looking for a job or they may not get an interview at all because they cannot smile.

At a dental event we met Frederick. He was seeking a partial denture because he wanted to be able to smile again. This wasn't just because he missed being able to smile. Frederick had a business idea he wanted to pitch. But he knew he would not be successful if potential investors saw him missing several teeth.

Basic dignity

According to a [report from the American Dental Association's Health Policy Institute](#), nearly 50% of low-income Kansas adults say life in general is less satisfying due to the condition of their mouth and teeth. But we don't need a report to tell us that people who are missing teeth are embarrassed and even avoid smiling. A smile not only makes others happy, but it makes the person smiling happy. Smiling is something everyone should be able to do in order to enjoy basic dignity. When people experience tooth loss, dentures and partials give them their smiles back.

Coverage in other states

According to the CareQuest Institute's [Medicaid Adult Dental Coverage Checker](#), nineteen states include denture coverage in Medicaid, including our neighbors in Nebraska, Iowa, and Colorado. Some states like Wisconsin have offered denture coverage for over 40 years. Kansas now has the opportunity to join our neighbors in covering dentures for adults enrolled in Medicaid.

Kansans want denture coverage

Oral Health Kansas is one of many stakeholders that believes it is time to ensure adults who are enrolled in Medicaid should have access to dentures or partials when they need it. [Two dozen statewide and local organizations have stepped up to ask for Medicaid adult dental coverage to include dentures starting this year.](#) These organizations are listed below. They include disabilities service providers, older adult advocates and providers, behavioral health advocates, early childhood advocates, food banks, homelessness advocates, dental care professional organizations, and health care professional organizations.

- Baptist-Trinity Lutheran Legacy Foundation
- CDDO of Butler County
- Central Plains Area Agency on Aging
- Doniphan County Services and Workskills
- Goodlife Innovations
- Harvesters - The Community Food Network
- Health Forward Foundation
- InterHab
- KanCare Advocates Network
- Kansas Advocates for Better Care
- Kansas Dental Association
- Kansas Dental Hygienists' Association
- Kansas Foodbank Warehouse, Inc.
- Kansas Head Start Association
- Kansas Health Care Association/KS Center for Assisted Living
- Kansas Public Health Association
- Kansas State Nurses Association
- Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition
Lakemary
- LeadingAge Kansas
- LINK, Inc
- NAMI-Kansas
- Rawlins County Dental Clinic Fund
- Second Harvest Community Food Bank

These groups represent the entirety of what it takes to make a healthy and happy life, and their support for denture coverage in Medicaid speaks volumes about the importance of this important service.

Funding Request

Oral Health Kansas asks this Committee to appropriate \$1.7 million, including \$687,000 from the State General Fund, to extend Medicaid adult dental coverage to include dentures and partials. The coverage would include replacement at least every five years as well as services to repair the

appliances. We believe consideration will need to be given upon implementation to paying the fee for service rate for the dentures and partials to Federally Qualified Health Centers, rather than the PPS rate.

Older adults, people with disabilities, and people with lower incomes are more likely to be missing teeth or have no teeth at all. This is exactly who the Medicaid population is. Approximately 38% of the Kansas Medicaid population is over age 21 and would be eligible for the new benefit. The budget projection includes a modest utilization rate, just under 20%. This seems low, but it is consistent with the experience of other states that provide denture coverage in Medicaid.

Thank you

We thank this Committee for your interest in and support of Medicaid adult dental care. You are true champions for people, and your action this year can ensure low-income adults are able to maintain their overall health, regain their dignity, eat healthy foods, and take advantage of economic opportunities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Tanya Dorf Brunner', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Tanya Dorf Brunner

Executive Director

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