



April 10, 2012

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The Honorable Dr. Jeff Colyer
300 SW 10th Ave., Second Floor
Topeka, KS 66612-1590

Dear Lt. Governor Colyer:

On behalf of Oral Health Kansas, I would like to encourage you to give strong consideration to selecting KanCare contractors that will include dental services for adults in the "value-added" services offered in their plans.

We have talked with some of the companies bidding on the KanCare managed care contracts about the important role oral health plays in overall health. KanCare allows managed care organizations to include "value-added" services in their plans. Such "value-added" services can offer Medicaid enrollees services outside the current Medicaid benefits in order to help maintain their overall health. We applaud the KanCare focus on maintaining overall health, and we agree that maintaining good overall health will help ensure people stay healthier as well as save valuable Medicaid dollars.

One of the most important ways people can maintain their overall health is by maintaining their oral health. Many Medicaid beneficiaries face multiple medical problems. Improving access to dental care and investing in prevention pays off in the long run. According to dentist and Stony Brook University professor of oral biology and pathology Maria Emanuel, periodontal disease is "initiated by bacteria that on their own do not cause the disease, but react in concert with risk factors that make a person susceptible, such as genetics, diabetes, obesity, smoking, medications, immune disorders, stress, and more." Access to regular dental services can help people control chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, and can help prevent premature births.

The Working Healthy program is one of the most successful examples of how people who've been dependent on assistance can go to work with the right supports. Because people in the Working Healthy program are able to buy their Medicaid coverage, they have greater independence, more self esteem, and can stay healthier. Satisfaction surveys in that program reveal that the need for dental services is frequently cited by enrollees.

Two enrollees disclosed on their surveys:

- "I believe the biggest health issue for me currently is dental services—my teeth are cracked & broken. I feel self-conscious because of that and can't eat raw vegetables or most meat because I can't chew."
- "I need lots of dental work—so much that I physically get sick—need help getting dentures."

Working Healthy participants also report experiencing high rates of oral pain (more than 40% had occasional or frequent pain), and 1 in 6 report at least occasionally having

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difficulty doing their usual job(s) because of problems with their teeth, mouth, or dentures.

The annual Kansas Mission of Mercy event sponsored by the Kansas Dental Charitable Foundation is the most visible indicator of the extreme need low-income Kansans have for dental care. Each year 92-93% of the Mission of Mercy patients are adults. The reason adults most often cite for coming to the Kansas Mission of Mercy is that they do not have a way to pay for dental care. A patient at the Mission of Mercy this year told a volunteer, "If you guys had a petition here that people could sign to ask for dental benefits, it would be full."

Kansans see the need for dental services. The services give people self esteem, help them get and keep jobs, and help them stay healthy in the face of other chronic diseases. We strongly encourage the administration to select managed care companies for the KanCare program that include dental benefits for adults in their "value-added" benefits. We are certain that managed care organizations that include dental benefits will see healthier Medicaid beneficiaries.

I am happy to provide any additional information or answer any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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

Tanya Dorf Brunner
Executive Director

Copy: Dr. Robert Moser, KDHE Secretary
Kari Bruffett, KDHE Division of Health Care Finance Director