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March 7, 2019

Testimony for House Social Services Budget Committee

Chairman Carpenter and Members of the Committee:

My name is Christi Nance, and I am the Policy Director at Oral Health Kansas, Inc. We are the state-wide 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. Thank you for the opportunity to share our opinion with the Committee today on the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) budget and the need to increase Medicaid dental reimbursement rates by 20%.

Dental benefits were one of the most important changes when the Medicaid program switched to managed care in 2013. Historically, preventive dental services have been one of the most utilized value-added benefits offered by the managed care organizations. However, in recent years, that utilization has had a downward trend because many KanCare beneficiaries are unable to access these services due to a lack of providers or a need for higher level care.

Medicaid reimbursement rates in Kansas have been one of the main problems impacting our dental provider network. Kansas currently pays about 40 cents on the dollar compared to private insurance for dental work, and that number has not been adjusted since 2001. Many general dentists and oral surgeons have dropped from Medicaid due to the inadequacy of rates to cover the basic cost of providing services.

Based on our research, Oral Health Kansas believes a 20% increase in reimbursement rates for dentists enrolled in KanCare would have a meaningful impact on the dental provider network in Kansas. We believe a 20% increase in rates would allow the state to actively recruit more dentists. An increase can prevent us from losing additional dentists and give us the opportunity to grow our already shrinking KanCare provider network. Other states that have approved a similar funding increase have seen their provider networks increase from one-third to doubled.^{1,2}

Without an adequate dental provider network, the KanCare population is struggling to access dental care. We receive frequent calls from families who cannot find a dentist who accepts Medicaid. This not only impacts the health of their mouth, but also the health of their entire body. Poor oral health is linked to an increase in heart disease, stroke, premature birth, and low birth weight. It also can prevent individuals from controlling chronic diseases, such as diabetes. Increasing reimbursement rates is an important first step in ensuring a viable dental provider network in Kansas.

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Increased reimbursement rates for dental providers was recommended by the KanCare Oversight Committee in November as one way to improve the oral health of Kansas. We ask that you continue to pursue this recommendation by placing funding for increased reimbursement rates for dentists enrolled in KanCare in the KDHE budget. As the Committee works to guarantee every Kansan has the dental coverage they need, please do not hesitate to contact me (cnance@ohks.org) if Oral Health Kansas can answer questions or otherwise assist the Committee.

Sincerely,



Christi Nance
Policy Director

¹ *The Effects of Medicaid Reimbursement Rates on Access to Dental Care*. National Academy for State Health Policy. March 2008. https://nashp.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/default/files/CHCF_dental_rates.pdf

² *Impact of Increased Reimbursement Rates on Husky A-Insured Children: 2006-2011*. Connecticut Health Foundation. March 2013. <https://www.cthealth.org/publication/impact-increased-dental-reimbursement-rates-husky-a-insured-children-2006-2011/>