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February 20, 2019

Testimony for Senate Ways and Means Subcommittee on Social Services

Chairwoman McGinn 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 on the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) budget with the Committee today.

As you prepare the budget for KDADS, Oral Health Kansas asks that you make oral health a priority through two avenues.

1. Increase Reimbursement Rates for Dental Providers Enrolled in KanCare

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. Without an adequate dental provider network, the KanCare population is struggling to access dental care. This not only impacts the health of their mouth, but the health of their entire body. Poor oral health has been 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.

2. Comprehensive Adult Dental Benefits

Preventive dental benefits were one of the most important changes in the KanCare Medicaid program when we switched to managed care. Preventive dental services are essential to maintaining oral health and overall health, however, many beneficiaries are unable to access these services due to a need for higher level care such as fillings, root canals, or even scaling. To ensure full access to the necessary dental coverage for KanCare consumers, we encourage the committee to consider including comprehensive dental benefits for adults in the KDADS budget. Dental services give people self-esteem, help them get and keep jobs, and ensure they stay healthy in the face of other chronic diseases. We are certain that our Medicaid program will see increased preventive dental visits, as well as healthier Medicaid beneficiaries.

Both increased reimbursement rates and comprehensive adult dental benefits were issues recommended by the KanCare Oversight Committee in November as ways to improve the oral health of Kansas. We ask that you continue to pursue this recommendation by placing funding for these issues in the KDADS 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

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