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House Social Services Budget Committee

KDHE Budget

February 8, 2022

Chairman Carpenter and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Kansas Department of Health and Environment budget. 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 in Kansas

Access to routine dental care is out of reach for low-income adults. KanCare includes the bare minimum dental benefits for adults, with only emergency dental services currently covered through the state plan. This means that people who have a dental problem, which can be life threatening, are able to have the tooth or teeth extracted. But KanCare does not pay for dentures when people lose teeth or for less expensive fillings and crowns which can prevent tooth loss in the first place. Many adults who were able to keep their teeth healthy in their childhood with regular cleanings and the occasional filling are not able to continue that oral health journey in their adulthood.

Since KanCare began we have praised the managed care organizations (MCO) for offering some dental benefits to adults through their Value-Added Benefits (VABs). They offer limited benefits, and while they are a valuable step forward, they do not amount to a system of care. The benefits change from year to year and vary from MCO to MCO. Families want a reliable way to access the routine dental care many of us take for granted. Oral health is tied to overall health, and the relationship between dental infections and heart disease, diabetes, and pre-term births is strong. VABs that change from time to time are not something people can depend on to keep them healthy.

People's oral health is key to their economic success. When they can access a full suite of dental care when they need it, they are able manage chronic diseases, smile with confidence, and earn a living. The way a person's teeth and mouth look have a big impact on how others view them and how they perceive themselves. This perception has a big impact on people's ability to work. Twice as many low-income adults as middle- and high-income Kansans say the appearance of their mouth and teeth affects their ability to interview for a job. Dental care can seem so routine for most of us, and when we access it regularly most of us avoid major dental problems. But it is out of reach for many low-income Kansans and affects their ability to get and maintain good jobs.

A New Day

We have been talking with this Committee for a few years about the importance of extending dental benefits to adults enrolled in KanCare. This year we are here with new information that changes the request and answers an age-old question: Will dental coverage save the state money? The answer is YES! For many years policymakers across the country have been asking whether money could be saved in

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Medicaid programs if dental coverage was included. Advocates and practitioners have always said yes and pointed to anecdotal evidence and stories. We know there will be savings because the connection between oral health and overall health is strong. The good news is that health researchers and economists at the American Dental Association's Health Policy Institute have developed a model to calculate the savings. The model shows how savings can be realized in treating cardiovascular disease and diabetes, as well as preventing dental disease in pregnant people and avoiding emergency room usage for dental pain. While an initial investment in dental coverage is required, the model shows that over time the savings will be realized and the fiscal impact will drop. Today you will hear from my colleague Dr. Chelsea Fosse from the American Dental Association about the study she and her team did using Kansas data to project the costs and savings that will be included in adult dental coverage. A copy of that study is included with my testimony.

Kansas adults struggle to find care

Oral Health Kansas is an advocacy and education organization, but each week families call us asking for help finding affordable dental care. Most of the calls we receive are from low-income adults who have no access to private or public insurance. One of our partners summed it up well this week: This issue is such a vicious circle. Chronic health conditions contribute to poor oral health. Poor oral healthcare access contributes to chronic health conditions.

Today I am sharing a few stories from families with adult children and individuals who no longer are able to access routine dental care and have to resort to extreme measures.



My son, Neil (27) has severe Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). He is functionally non-verbal. When he was a child, it was easy to find a dentist who accepted Medicaid. However, after he turned 21, it was a struggle to find a dentist who accepted Medicaid, and sedation dentistry options were limited. Therefore, it was difficult to get regular dental check-ups. It took 6 months to get an appointment. After being examined, the dentist determined that he needed to get 5 of his teeth extracted. Thereafter, an appointment for extraction took a long wait time also. He was able to get his extraction done on December 30, 2021. It seemed an insurmountable effort to find dental care for my son after he turned 21.

-Aldona Carney (Mother of Neil)
Wichita, KS



Sandra is 24 has many medical issues. However, the main one is quadriplegic cerebral palsy. Sandra's dental care has been a nightmare! As a child she would have to go into the hospital every two years for a deep cleaning and x-rays. This dentist was wonderful! When Sandra turned 21 everything changed. She lost her dentist whom she had since birth. I began to search for dentists in who also accepted Medicaid. It was not an easy task. I had to contact Sunflower Insurance and they recommended a clinic that accepted Medicaid. She got her teeth cleaned by a hygienist and was referred to a specialist dentist for a deep cleaning. None covered Medicaid. So, I reached out to the clinic she visited previously, and they offered sedation. To qualify for sedation, I had a substantial amount of paperwork to complete. After 3 years, I was informed that Sandra wasn't qualified due to medical

issues. Therefore, I reached out to Sunflower again and they provided a list of 20 clinics accepting Medicaid. This went in vain, when I reached out to all the clinics on the list, either they had reached their capacity of Medicaid patients or the one that would accept her didn't have a hospital setting.

Through word of mouth, I found a dentist for my daughter. It was an hour and a half from where we were residing. In the due course, I had taken out supplemental dental insurance for Sandra. The dentist wouldn't have accepted Medicaid alone, the supplemental dental insurance was necessary so now Sandra got her wisdom teeth pulled out in the hospital setting. and we ended up in the night at the hospital because she had breathing issue. It is difficult that after you turn 21 you just exit the program.

-Melanie (Mother of Sandra)
Wichita, KS

Calls for help Oral Health Kansas has received:

I am 22 and Medicaid covered my dental health and treatments until I was 21. I have two children and I work part-time. I am unable to pay for dental work out of pocket as the cost is more than my paychecks. It is difficult for people like me, who are below the poverty line, to get dental care. I have many fillings and other dental work that I need to have done but unfortunately, Medicaid covers none of it.

-Topeka, KS

I have had bad teeth all my life, I have pulled 2 teeth on my own, because I couldn't afford to go the dentist. I tried getting help, but no one would help me. My teeth are falling one by one, and I have been in so much pain. I can barely eat, and I can't brush my teeth because they hurt so bad. I constantly have a tooth ache. I have reached out to so many programs to try to get help, no one will help me. I'm scared my teeth are going to be the death of me. I have been so depressed; I don't smile, and I try not to talk to anybody.

-Kansas City, KS

I am the Health Coordinator for a Head Start preschool in Kansas. I have found it difficult to help parents find a dentist that does sedation on children. It seems the dentist in my area that accepts Medicaid patients only do local anesthetic. My students are very young and need a lot of dental work. I would like to see more dentists that accept Medicaid and offer sedation.

-Topeka

My son is 20 and has Autism. His oral health is not good. He is very sensory sensitive and brushing his teeth is extremely difficult. We have found dental care but now his Medicaid no longer covers his needs. He need sedation for most work. We are having to pay cash for his dental care. So far, the cost has been several thousand dollars in the first year with no coverage. I am a single parent who is legal guardian. This has created great financial hardship. He currently has income around \$600 per month so he does not have money to cover these things. It was covered completely as a child but now that he is an adult there is nothing.

-Goddard

Broad Support for Adult Dental Coverage

Organizations that support Kansans across the lifespan agree that dental coverage for adults enrolled in KanCare is a priority for the state. They include the behavioral health, aging, disabilities, and healthcare communities, as well as dental providers and schools.

- Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas
- Central Plains Area Agency on Aging
- CDDO of Butler County
- Community Action, Inc.
- Community Care Network of Kansas
- Fales Pediatric Dentistry, PA
- Health Forward Foundation
- InterHab
- Johnson County Community College Dental Hygiene
- Johnson County Dental Care
- KanCare Advocates Network
- Kansas Action for Children
- Kansas Advocates for Better Care
- Kansas Association of Area Agencies on Aging
- Kansas Dental Hygienists' Association
- Kansas Public Health Association
- LeadingAge Kansas
- NAMI Kansas
- REACH Healthcare Foundation
- Reno County Head Start
- SKIL Resource Center
- Sunflower Foundation
- United Methodist Health Ministry Fund

Adult Dental Request

The reasons to extend dental coverage in KanCare to adults are myriad. They include improving people's health, saving money, expanding economic opportunities, and ensuring basic dignity. Extending dental coverage to adults is not a magic bullet. Many challenges will remain, including improving the provider network and ensuring community health centers are able to successfully offer care. States across the country are improving access to dental care for adults enrolled in Medicaid. Our neighbors in Missouri, Nebraska, and Colorado all offer dental care for adults. So many states are ahead of Kansas, and we will be able to learn from them how to roll out the benefits effectively. We are prepared to be a part of that effort and to work with our partners, including the Department of Health and Environment, to ensure all adults have the ability to be healthy, happy, and employed.

We request that the Committee include \$1.4 million SGF (\$3.4 million All Funds) in the KDHE budget to extend dental coverage to adults enrolled in Medicaid.

Postpartum Coverage

Oral Health Kansas facilitates a leadership program called the Dental Champions Leadership Program. Our most recent class studied the issues, challenges, and opportunities surrounding access to dental care for pregnant people and children ages zero to three. These populations are among the most vulnerable to dental disease and the accompanying health problems, and they have some of the lowest rates of dental care usage.

The Dental Champions class included representatives from Head Start, children's services organizations, insurance companies, health clinics, private dental offices, and a dental school. After

studying the issues and learning from state and national experts, the class concluded that one of the policy changes that is necessary to ensure families stay healthy is extending KanCare postpartum coverage for a year. When parents are enrolled in Medicaid there is a higher chance their children will receive important well-child visits. Our organization believes it is important to keep parents healthy in order for children to grow up healthy, and we urge the Committee to include funding for one year of postpartum KanCare coverage for new moms.

Thank you

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information with you. We urge the Committee to include funding for adult dental care in the KDHE budget and to support the Governor's recommendation to include postpartum coverage. I am happy to answer any questions and provide additional information.

Sincerely,



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Executive Director

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