

**House Social Services Budget Committee
Department on Aging Budget
March 3, 2010**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about the 2011 Department on Aging Budget. My name is Tanya Dorf Brunner, and I am the Executive Director of Oral Health Kansas. We are a statewide coalition dedicated to improving oral health in Kansas through advocacy, public awareness, and education. We have over 1000 supporters, including dentists, dental hygienists, educators, safety net clinics, charitable foundations, and advocates for children, people with disabilities and older Kansans.

Waiver Dental Services

In 2007 the Legislature established dental services for people who are on the developmental disabilities (DD), physical disabilities (PD), traumatic brain injury (TBI) and frail elderly (FE) Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) waivers. Since then thousands of Kansans have had access to basic dental services, including cleanings, root canals, and basic fillings. Research shows that people who receive routine dental services are able to better manage oral health problems that could lead to more serious and costly health problems, including pneumonia, strokes, and heart conditions.

As a result of the November 2009 allotment, dental services for people on the PD, DD, and TBI waivers have been eliminated, and dental services for people on the FE waiver will be accessed only through a rare crisis exception.

I want to commend the Department on Aging for their dedication to the dental services by ensuring it remains at least minimally accessible through a crisis exception. Few people will be able to access dental services through the FE waiver, but the Department has shown a fierce dedication to the service by ensuring it is not eliminated completely.

Best of Times/Worst of Times

When dental services were first added to the FE waiver, there was a woman in her 70s living in Wichita who had not left her home in ages. She stayed indoors, refused visitors, and lost a lot of weight. When a case manager from the Central Plains Area Agency on Aging finally was able to meet with the woman, she discovered she needed dental services, including dentures. She received the services she needed, got a new set of dentures, and her life changed. Now she leaves the house every day, smiles, and is eating again. She recently celebrated her 78th birthday at a dinner theatre, which was her first big social event in five years. The FE waiver dental services made all the difference in the world to this lady.

This week we learned of an 88 year old woman in Pratt. She is a resident of a rehabilitation center. Her teeth have deteriorated to the point that she now has abscesses, even though she has done her best to practice daily oral hygiene care. This past weekend, the nursing staff sent her to the emergency room because she is in such pain. The ER only recommended that she see a dentist. She will lose her teeth but will not receive dentures. She will be limited to soft foods and will have the emotional trauma of living the rest of her life toothless.

Both of these women have lived and worked in Kansas, paying taxes and being productive members of their communities. It's more than unfortunate that only one of them was able access the dental services she needed because she happened to need them at a convenient time when the services were available.

Cost of Care

In the first six months of FY 2010, 519 Kansas seniors accessed dental services through the FE waiver at an average cost of \$965 each. They needed everything from basic exams to crowns and fillings to about 15 sets of dentures.

Anyone who has had any dental problem knows the pain associated with a sore tooth in need of attention from a dentist. I can't imagine what it would be like to need a dentist and not be able to access one. That's exactly what has happened since January 2010. About 173 people have been in that situation since January because they have not been able to access the FE waiver's dental services.

The people who are on the FE waiver were once tax-paying citizens who helped contribute to the needs of their fellow citizens. It's not right for their fellow citizens to let them down now. Oral Health Kansas urges you to restore the FE dental services and help Kansas seniors smile again.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to stand for any questions.