

**Social Services Budget Committee
Kansas Health Policy Authority Budget
March 2, 2010**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Kansas Health Policy Authority 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. Our 1000 supporters include dentists, dental hygienists, educators, safety net clinics, charitable foundations, and advocates for children, people with disabilities and older Kansans.

Since our founding seven years ago, Oral Health Kansas has made Medicaid dental services a high priority. Our goal is that all Kansans have access to affordable dental care. Over the years we have seen dental services for people on the Home and Community-Based Services waivers implemented and funding appropriated for dental services for pregnant women. But, in the last few months we've seen this money and these services disappear.

Oral Health services, if provided regularly, are preventive and help people avoid more serious and costly problems. Oral health has not been a strong focus of most Medicaid programs, but it could and should be a wise use of resources to invest in preventive oral health care. Routine oral health evaluations and proper treatment can prevent the growth and spread of dental infections. Such infections can be life threatening by the time they are recognized, leading to emergency room visits and lengthy hospital stays, both of which are costly to Medicaid and to a person's health.

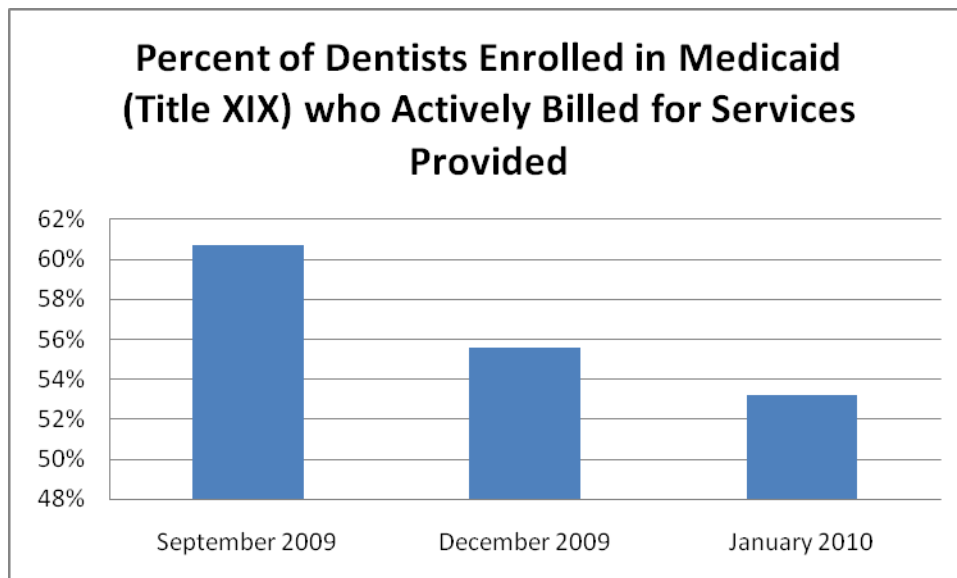
Restoration of Dental Services for Pregnant Women

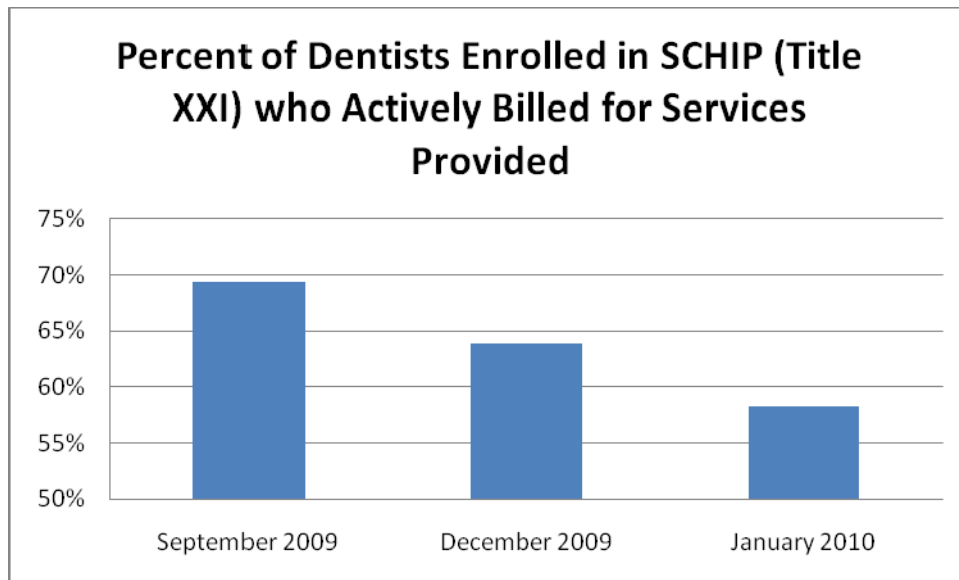
A year ago, the Legislature did make an important investment in preventive oral health care when funds were appropriated to cover dental services for pregnant women. When the state budget began to deteriorate last summer, the very first Medicaid cut was these dental services for pregnant women. The service dollars were in KHPA's budget for FY 2010, but they were never used because KHPA did not have the administrative resources to implement the program. In the first Medicaid cuts in July, these service dollars were eliminated.

The national dental public health listserv recently featured a January 22, 2010, scientific report which found a link between a pregnant mother's gum disease and her baby's death. The bacteria from her gum disease is believed to have entered the baby's system and compromised it, leading to its death. Given that Medicaid pays for 40% of the births in Kansas, the investment in dental services for pregnant women can not only save lives, but also save state dollars in complicated deliveries. Oral Health Kansas urges you to restore the service and administrative dollars for pregnant women's dental services. This investment will help more babies be born healthy and will cost Medicaid less in the long run.

Erosion of Access to Kansas Dental Services

Last fall just 29 percent of all Kansas dentists actively billed Medicaid for services. With less than a third of Kansas dentists actively billing Medicaid even before the 10% was made, clearly many Kansans were not able to access basic dental services they need. The cut further erodes Kansans' ability to access services. The rate cut also adds stress to a Kansas dental workforce already in decline. KDHE conducted a dental workforce study last summer which showed that in only 10 years nearly one third of Kansas dentists will be retiring. With declining reimbursement rates and a declining workforce, it will be very difficult for anyone but the very rich to access basic dental services in Kansas.





Pew's report card on states' dental policies

Last week the Pew Children's Dental Campaign released a report card on dental policies in each of the 50 states. Pew rated the states on eight topics, including three related to Medicaid coverage of and payment for dental services. Kansas received a grade of C, based in part on low Medicaid rates for dental services. Nationally Medicaid programs reimburse dentists about 60.5% of the cost of the services. The report card gave Kansas low marks for the state Medicaid program reimbursing dentists about 53.5% of the cost of services. This data is from 2008, so it does not take into account the recent precipitous drop in Medicaid rates. If the report card were issued again today based on today's Medicaid rates, it would look worse.

Pew did give Kansas high marks for the share of children enrolled in Medicaid who received dental services and for allowing medical providers to provide basic preventive dental health care (e.g., fluoride varnish).

Let us maintain the good things Kansas is doing for people who receive Medicaid-funded dental services, and let us at the very least restore the Medicaid rates to their previous levels. Let us also not forget the first Medicaid cut – the elimination of dental services for pregnant women.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.