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**Ways and Means Subcommittee on Department on Aging  
February 17, 2011**

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about the Department on Aging 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. We achieve our mission through advocacy, public awareness, and education. Oral Health Kansas has over 1,100 supporters, including dentists, dental hygienists, educators, safety net clinics, charitable foundations, and advocates for children, people with disabilities and older Kansans.

We see three types of barriers to accessing oral health in our state: access to a payment source; access to a provider; and willingness to access services. All three types of access must be present in order for people to have adequate access to oral health care. With our partners in the oral health field, we are working to address each of these through a variety of means.

**Access to a payment source**

A few years ago the Legislature authorized a dental benefit for people who are on the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services waivers. Through this benefit thousands of Kansans had access to basic dental services, including cleanings, root canals, and basic fillings, but thousands more were left out of the benefit, including people who reside in nursing homes. Funding for the waiver dental services was eliminated in budget cuts last year.

The Department on Aging is to be commended for keeping dental services at least minimally available on the Frail Elderly waiver through a crisis exception request process. Because of this crisis exception process, many seniors who have urgent and life-threatening dental problems have been able to receive the services they need. The agency has demonstrated its commitment to the importance of dental health to overall health with the crisis exception, and we extend our thanks to the agency for their commitment.

Oral Health Kansas is advocating for implementation of a full dental benefit for all people eligible for Medicaid. We believe all people deserve access to a way to pay for routine dental services, rather than being forced to suffer through dental pain and risk disease. The FE waiver dental benefit was a tremendous asset for people on the waiver, but it was not available for people who live in nursing homes. As Medicare does not include a dental benefit, Kansas seniors who qualify for both Medicaid and Medicare have no access to dental services at all.

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