

WEEKLY WEDNESDAY UPDATE

The Weekly Wednesday Update is our newsletter which we email every Wednesday with oral health, health and policy updates from around the state and nationally.

To view past issues [click here](#).

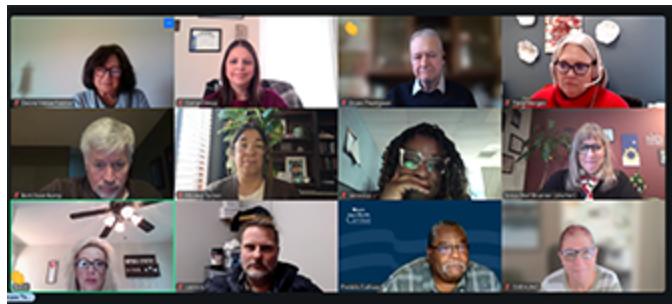
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OHK's Leadership for 2026

The Oral Health Kansas Board of Directors held their last board meeting of the year on Friday, December 5. Although it was a virtual meeting, this particular meeting was close to the heart as we said farewell to two of our board members that have served their full terms. Veronica Byrd and

Preddis Sullivan both served for six years, and Dr. Sullivan led the board as the President for two of

those years. We will miss their thoughtful feedback on how OHK can keep growing and their positive words to encourage us!

Please join us in welcoming our slate of officers for the upcoming term:

- President: Melanie Simmer-Beck, PhD, RDH
- Past President: Tami Allen
- Vice President: Linda J. Sheppard, JD
- Secretary: Debra Meisenheimer
- Treasurer: Charles (Chuck) Abbick, DDS

We're looking forward to their guidance moving forward!



Join the 2026 Push for a Medicaid Dental Rate Increase

A Medicaid dental rate increase went into effect on July 1, 2025, and that's something to celebrate as we see this year come to a close. But the work isn't finished yet. Let's start preparing for our work in 2026. The increase, while historic, still does not cover the significant costs of running a dental office. To ensure Medicaid dental rates are competitive with commercial rates, Oral Health Kansas and partners are advocating for the Legislature to complete the job this upcoming legislative session.

Your voice matters more than ever to help the Legislature understand why a further increase in the rates is needed to maintain and improve the dental provider network. Whether it's raising awareness among colleagues, emailing legislators, sharing your story, or simply signing on with your organization's name, every action helps build momentum.

Join the advocacy coalition today by adding your name to [this form](#). Together, we can strengthen the dental provider network and make sure Kansans with Medicaid coverage have access to the dental care they need.



Oral Health Insights for Future Nurse Practitioners

Kathy Hunt, Dental Program Director at Oral Health Kansas, recently shared her expertise with Nurse Practitioner (NP) students at Washburn University. During the session, Kathy highlighted the critical connection between oral health and overall health, emphasizing practical strategies NPs can use to integrate oral care into routine patient visits. Students

explored topics such as early detection of oral disease, patient communication tips, and the importance of collaboration between medical and dental providers.

By equipping future nurse practitioners with these skills, Kathy's presentation helps ensure that oral health becomes a routine part of comprehensive patient care!

The Heart-Mouth Connection



Thanks to our friends at the American Heart Association, they're bringing awareness to the connection between our mouths and our hearts! Your dental provider can detect oral health issues in your mouth that may lead to other problems in your body, including your heart. If you currently have heart issues or other chronic conditions, it's important to take care of your mouth. The mouth is the first step to what is put in our body and can cause havoc in our bodies which is why we take a look at our overall health to include our mouth.

[This helpful guide](#) from the American Heart Association, makes the point that when your gums are swollen, red, or bleed easily, that's called inflammation. It means your body is fighting off germs. But if your mouth stays inflamed for a long time, those tiny germs and chemicals from the inflammation can get into your bloodstream, getting to your heart and causing your heart to work harder!

To stay on top of your oral health:

- Brush your teeth twice a day and floss!
- Drink tap water. Staying hydrated not only keeps us healthy but it keeps our minds alert!
- Choose healthy foods and snacks.
- Visit the dentist every 6 months, if possible, but go to the dentist!

For more tips on oral health, visit our [Tips and Tricks](#) on our consumer webpage.



Upcoming Events

- Course: An Introduction to Value-Based Care in Oral Health: Moving from Volume to Value, 1 CE. Click [here](#) for the course information.
- Self paced courses: [Providing Oral Health Care to Autistic Individuals](#) and [Caring for Individuals with Disabilities: Practical Considerations for Dental Providers](#).
- Virtual event hosted by Kansas Health Institute, Health on the Plains Summit, December 11, 10am-1pm CST. Register [here](#).
- Save the date! The 2026 Conference on Oral Health will be Friday, November 13.



During the December board meeting, OHK's Board President, Tami Allen, presented Executive Director, Tanya Dorf Brunner, with the Chairman's Award. The Chairman's Award was established to honor an individual whose exemplary action embodies one of the three foundational pillars of Oral Health Kansas, which are advocacy, public awareness, and education. Tanya has led the advocacy work to increase the Medicaid dental rates and has guided the work for the Pathways to Oral Health project. Her dedication to improving the oral health of Kansans inspires excellence and elevates the entire OHK team!



Sugary Drink Display

We have Adult and Children's Sugary Drink Display's available for reservations. These displays are eye catching at exhibits, schools, library, dental offices, clinics and just about anywhere you see them! We only have a limited amount so please sign up soon if you're interested in reserving one. Click [here](#) to learn more about sugary drink display reservations!

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