

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](#).

April 22, 2026

Volume 17, Issue 15

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Kansas Well Represented at the National Oral Health Conference

Last week, Oral Health Kansas staff attended the National Oral Health Conference in Oklahoma City. The week began with the American Network of Oral Health Coalitions (ANOHC) meeting. Each state that is a member of ANOHC shared what they're working on. Wow, we learned a lot! It was great meeting people that are working hard all over the

United States to make their communities healthier! These are some determined people!

OHK staff presented four different sessions and two round tables. Melanie Jacobs, Lived Experience Advisory Group member was on a panel and shared her story about being a parent with an adult child with a disability who struggled to find dental care. Thank you to Tara Dimick, CEO of Compass Marketing and Advertising Partners for joining us and sharing how telling the stories of consumers and providers is helping the Pathways to Oral Health campaign grow.

Blake Harris and Trisha Martin joined us from the Kansas Neurological Institute (KNI). KNI has integrated oral health into their new staff trainings. Staff are trained on how to brush the teeth of others and how to manage residents that struggle with toothbrushing. Although this is a work in progress, they're seeing improvements in residents' oral health and staff members are also commenting on how much they have learned about dental care. An audience member praised KNI and said this should be a national model.

Staff also gave presentations about the Feeling Good About Your Smile educational program and toolkit to advocate for dental offices to accept Medicaid.

We are grateful for our partners who drove hours away to be at this conference with us and share the importance of the work we are doing together.



Rate Increase Signed into Law!

Governor Kelly signed the new budget bill into law on April 9. The bill includes \$2 million in state general funds for a second Medicaid dental rate increase. With the federal matching funds, the new rate increase should total about \$5 million. This is roughly half as much as the rate increase in 2025, but in a year in which budget cutting was the priority in the Kansas Legislature, it is meaningful that a further investment in the Medicaid dental program was a priority.

Dozens of dental providers and consumers joined in the advocacy to push for the rate increase. It is part of the [Pathways to Oral Health](#) strategy to grow the Medicaid dental provider network. Following the 2025 rate increase, the pace at which dental providers were leaving the Kansas Medicaid program slowed, and at least 30 providers joined the program.

Oral Health Kansas and the Kansas Dental Association will partner with the Kansas Medicaid program to use provider insight to target the 2026 increase at services that will be the most impactful. More information about this will be available in the coming weeks. The rate increase is scheduled to go into effect on July 1, 2026.

This year the Kansas Legislature also invested \$1 million to pay for mobile anesthesia services for in-office sedation for dental care for people who have dual Medicare and Medicaid eligibility. This has been a service gap for several years, and this new funding should address that challenge.



ANOHC Seeks Communications and Meetings Coordinator

The American Network of Oral Health Coalitions (ANOHC) is a national organization supporting state and territorial oral health coalitions. ANOHC has announced a new opportunity to join their growing team as a Communications and Meetings Coordinator.

This new role will lead day-to-day communications, including social media, newsletters, content creation, and website updates, while also supporting virtual member meetings and an in-person annual convening. The position will play a key role in ensuring consistent, high-quality communications and meaningful connections across the national coalition network.

Learn more about the position through the link at the top of the [ANOHC website](#)



Nominate the Next Oral Health Award Winner

The Excellence in Oral Health Award nominations are open. Nominate someone who has made over the top efforts to create better oral health opportunities in Kansas.

Last year, Melanie Jacobs won the Excellence in Oral Health Volunteer Award. She joined Oral Health Kansas' Lived Experience Advisory Group when it formed in 2023. Her daughter Sandra is a young adult with developmental disabilities who has struggled to access dental care. Since she joined the Lived Experience group, she has become an integral volunteer with our organization. Melanie has presented legislative testimony several times, sat on a panel at the Conference on Oral Health and the Community Care Network of Kansas dental conference, and most recently presented at the National Oral Health Conference in Oklahoma. She's also given presentations to dental students and dental hygiene students to help them understand the barriers people with disabilities face in accessing dental care.

Do you know someone who is making a difference? You can nominate them for an Excellence in Oral Health Award.

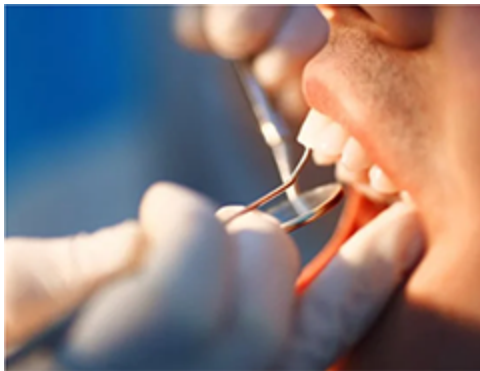
The categories are listed below:

- Outstanding Organization Award - An organization that is distinguished from others in excellence in promoting oral health awareness in Kansas.
- Outstanding Dental Hygienist Award - A dental hygienist that is distinguished from others in excellence, who goes beyond the call of duty and is committed to improving the oral health of

Kansans.

- Outstanding Dentist Award - A dentist that is distinguished from others in excellence, who goes beyond the call of duty and is committed to improving the oral health of Kansans.
- Outstanding Community Leader Award - A community leader that is distinguished from others in excellence, who goes beyond the call of duty and is committed to improving the oral health of Kansans.
- Bob Bethell Outstanding Policy Maker Award - An outstanding policy maker that is distinguished from others in excellence, who shows support for the oral health of all Kansans.
- Outstanding Oral Health Volunteer Award - An outstanding non-dental volunteer who demonstrates a positive difference in an organization - someone who saw a problem and got involved to find a solution.
- Ron Alexander Outstanding Dental Champion Award - This award is designed to recognize the outstanding work a Dental Champion has done as a direct result of participating in the Dental Champions Leadership Program.

[Follow this link](#) and nominate someone now. The deadline for submitting nominations is Friday, August 28 by 5:00pm.



National Minority Health Month

National Minority Health Month, observed every April, raises awareness about health disparities affecting racial and ethnic minority communities and promotes health equity. This annual recognition highlights the need for tailored, culturally responsive care to reduce disproportionate rates of illness and premature death. Minority populations often experience higher rates of chronic diseases (diabetes, heart disease, cancer), higher infant

mortality, and lower life expectancy.

During the National Oral Health Conference, we were welcomed by one of the Native American tribes in Oklahoma and enjoyed hearing about their culture and were fortunate enough to see several of their tribal dances. We also learned Native Americans had the best oral health before the 1950's. This superior health was primarily due to a traditional, low-sugar diet and natural cleaning practices, such as chewing sticks and leaves. This drastically changed after the 1950s due to the introduction of processed foods and the loss of traditional eating habits. Unfortunately, they now have the worst oral health because of barriers their populations face. They lack access to dentists and also feel more comfortable with providers who know their cultures. Only about 20 people who are Native American graduate from dental school every year, so the population of dentists from the indigenous communities is very low. We can continue to educate them about healthy foods and beverages, encourage them to brush their teeth with fluoride toothpaste and see a dentist if possible, every six months.

It's important for providers and educators to be sensitive to Native American cultures when educating them about maintaining their oral health.



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](#).
- **Webinar:** Medical-Dental Integration 101, April 9 from 6 - 7 p.m. CST. Register [here](#).
- Kansas Public Health Association Conference, October 5 - 6, 2026 in Manhattan. Click [here](#) for information.
- Rutgers University offering Perinatal Oral Health ECHO Series. Check out the list of series [here](#).
- Save the date! The 2026 Conference on Oral Health will be Friday, November 13 at the KU Edwards Campus.



Congratulations to our very own Kathy Hunt, Dental Program Director, for being awarded the 2026 M. Dean Perkins Distinguished Service award during the National Oral Health Conference last week. This honor is presented by the Association of State & Territorial

Dental Directors (ASTDD) to individuals or organizations demonstrating outstanding contributions to dental public health. Kathy, along with Gina Sharps, was awarded for their work as the leads for the Dental Hygienist Liaison Project. The project was supported through the National Center on Health, Behavioral Health, and Safety, and which supports dental hygienists from each state who help promote oral health among expectant parents and children enrolled in Head Start programs.



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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