



## 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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## Passport Presented at National Conference

This week Oral Health Kansas' MaryAnne Lynch Small and Tanya Dorf Brunner presented at the [Association of Aging with Developmental Disabilities](#) 35th annual conference. Disabilities and aging professionals from 28 states gathered in St. Louis for two days of meetings about strategies to ensure people with developmental disabilities have individualized, flexible services that can grow and change with them as they age.

MaryAnne and Tanya shared many of the [Pathways to Oral Health](#) resources, including [My Dental Care Passport](#) and the award-winning “[Confidence in Every Smile](#)” video series. The audience included disability support and healthcare professionals who experience challenges in connecting people with developmental disabilities to dental care. These are the very challenges Pathways to Oral Health was created to address, and it is clear these challenges know no state boundary. We are hopeful some of the tools and resources we have created in Kansas can help disability support professionals across the country.



## Champions of Change Awards

The first Dental Champions Leadership Class began in 2005! Twenty years later, we still see several alumni at our conference, at meetings, on webinars and even on social media. They are still out in Kansas, or for some, in other states, bringing awareness to the importance of oral health.

The Ron Alexander Outstanding Dental Champion award is a way to honor these Dental Champions for their work. Their leadership and willingness to continue the efforts they learned in their Dental Champions class can be recognized at the Conference on Oral Health on Friday, November 13 at the KU Edwards Campus in Overland Park.

The nomination process is simple but when thinking about the individual, what makes them stand out? Provide as much detail as possible. Submit your nominations by Friday, August 28 by 5:00pm.

Click here for the [Ron Alexander Outstanding Dental Champion Award](#). You can also submit a nomination for the [Excellence in Oral Health Award](#). Email [info@oralhealthkansas.org](mailto:info@oralhealthkansas.org) with any questions about the awards nominations. Thank you!



## Editorial Notes More Progress is Needed to Repair Healthcare System

Last week the *Kansas Reflector* published an editorial that lays out a vision for a more cohesive health care system in Kansas. Dr. Walter Taminang’s “[Repairing a scattered, inequitable Kansas health care system requires imagination, ambition](#)” points out that not all Kansans live in a county with providers, have insurance, and can find a provider they need. The low rate of Medicaid dental providers is highlighted as one of the challenges large numbers of Kansans face.

In his editorial, Taminang notes, “Many specialists, particularly in psychiatry, orthopedics and dentistry, do not accept Medicaid patients, leading to long wait times or the need to travel significant distances for

care. In practice, this creates a system where having insurance does not necessarily mean being able to use it.”

He says that several promising efforts are underway to address the large gaps in access to healthcare in the state. The [Pathways to Oral Health](#) initiative is just that – a comprehensive, stakeholder-driven strategy to deliver on the promise of Medicaid adult dental services by ensuring there are enough Medicaid dental providers available.

Over the past five years, the Kansas Legislature has invested in establishing Medicaid adult dental benefits and two rate increases. With these investments alongside the Pathways to Oral Health initiative, progress is being made. Taminang concludes his editorial by saying that we need “policy, financing, and political will to build a healthcare system that works for Kansans.” During legislative testimony last week, Oral Health Kansas pointed out that the Legislature is using policy, financing, and political will to reform the Medicaid dental system. We still have a long way to go, but we are on the right path.



## Maternal Mental Health Month

May is Maternal Mental Health Month where we look at the challenges of motherhood that are not always spoken out loud. The [Mental Health Leadership Alliance](#) states Maternal mental health conditions are the MOST COMMON complication of pregnancy and birth, affecting 800,000 families each year in the United States. The [Maternal Mental Health Fact sheet](#) shares the dramatic change in hormones during pregnancy and in the immediate postpartum period can have a significant impact on mood. [In Kansas](#), about 1 in 7 women experience postpartum depression. Depression could cause lack of self care, including not keeping up with healthy habits such as dental care.

A previous Oral Health Kansas intern, Isha Kothari, submitted her story to Kansas Health Institute about the struggles she felt with postpartum depression. Her powerful story won a storytelling contest last year. She talks about the feeling prepared but after having her baby, everything changed. After searching resources and speaking to someone, she was able to find help at Heartland Community Health Center. You can read Isha’s story [here](#).

If you are struggling with emotions and feelings that you can’t explain, it’s important to find someone to talk to, whether it’s a family member or friend, or someone in your community. You will soon find out that you are not alone and there is help.

## What Does Smoking Tobacco Look Like?

Smoking tobacco now looks different than years ago. Companies are making products that are enticing youth to purchase their items. Parents may see an object that looks similar to a USB drive, candy or even



a pen and not know it contains tobacco. How do you know what to look out for?

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Bureau of Health Promotion, has a [new online resource](#) to help you distinguish new products that youth are now using to smoke tobacco, such as vapes and pods.

Studies have shown that nicotine can increase the chance of gingivitis or gum inflammation, leading to periodontal disease that causes severe damage to the gums and the jaw bone. For those who already have gum disease, nicotine can mask the usual symptoms of swollen and bleeding gums giving the resemblance that the condition has improved. E-cigarettes contain less nicotine than tobacco cigarettes but do still carry the same effect on the gums. One Juul pod contains as much nicotine as 1 pack of cigarettes. Nicotine also stains your teeth.

Oral Health Kansas also has a one pager Tip and Trick for Vaping. [Check it out!](#)



## National Physical Fitness and Sports Month

Summer break will begin soon for many and that also means the summer sports will begin! In honor of National Physical Fitness and Sports Month, we'll take a minute to remind families to get the sports gears and that includes a mouthpiece. Mouthpieces are important in physical sports to help reduce mouth injury. It does not prevent it, but it sure does help! A mouth guard could prevent your teeth from scraping your cheeks. Your teeth can clench down on it instead of the inside of your mouth preventing harm from biting your lips.

What happens if your child gets hit in the mouth with a baseball and cracks a tooth? [Tips and Tricks Dental First Aid](#) provides information on what supplies to have on hand to help treat injuries before going to the dentist. [Dental First Aid](#) provides instructions on what to do for injuries to the mouth.



## 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](#).
- Community Care Network of Kansas annual conference, September

23-25 in Manhattan, Kansas. Learn more [here](#).

- Kansas Public Health Association Conference, October 5 - 6, 2026 in Manhattan. Click [here](#) for information.
- **Webinar:** 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.



Laura Gigstad, RDH, BS, ECP III, is joining Oral Health Kansas as an intern during the summer! She is working on her Masters Degree in Public Health Practice at the University of Kansas Medical Center. Laura is the Dental Operations Manager at AllWays Community Health Center. AllWays has several locations in Kansas including Topeka. They're also a member of the Shawnee County Oral Health Coalition. Laura says she's looking forward to learning from OHK but we're looking forward to learning from her!



## 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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