



**Federal and State Affairs Committee
Hearing on Senate Bill 462
March 15, 2012**

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Chairman Brungardt and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding SB 462. My name is Tanya Dorf Brunner, and I am the Executive Director of Oral Health Kansas. 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.

“Other Tobacco Products”

SB 462 would raise the tax rate on “other tobacco products” from 10% to 30% of the wholesale sales price. The last time the tax rate on these products was addressed in Kansas was 1972.

Smokeless tobacco is the most common form of “other tobacco products.” Generally smokeless tobacco users keep tobacco in their mouths for several hours at a time. Keeping tobacco in the mouth for just thirty minutes is equivalent to smoking four cigarettes. The chemicals used in smokeless tobacco are highly addictive, and every time the tobacco is used, the body adjusts to the amount of tobacco that is needed. This means people need a little more tobacco all the time to get the feeling they desire.

Smokeless Tobacco Can Cause Cancer

The U.S. Surgeon General issued a statement in 1986 saying that smokeless tobacco “is not a safe substitute for smoking cigarettes. It can cause cancer.”¹

Only three percent of American adults use smokeless tobacco. Yet they have the same risk of gum disease, heart disease and addiction as smokers. They also have an even greater risk of oral cancer. People who contract oral cancer run a 27% risk of death from the disease.¹ Only slightly more than half of people newly diagnosed with oral cancer this year will be alive in five years.² According to the MD Anderson Cancer Center most people who are diagnosed with oral cancer are tobacco users.³

800 SW Jackson, Suite 1120
Topeka, KS 66612

785.235.6039 (phone)
785.233.5564 (fax)
info@oralhealthkansas.org

www.oralhealthkansas.org

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Oral Cancer Death in Our Family

A death from oral cancer has touched the Oral Health Kansas family. We contract with several people to help provide oral health education across the state. One of our contractors lost his 32-year-old son-in-law to oral cancer. His son-in-law began chewing tobacco at age 9 and was diagnosed with oral cancer in his mid-twenties. He underwent radiation treatment and surgery and was disfigured to the point where he could no longer eat. Even with the treatment he received, he died not long after being diagnosed with the cancer caused by his use of smokeless tobacco. The family tragedy has made our contract educator a powerful advocate for oral health.

Cost of Oral Cancer

The Oral Cancer Center estimates \$3.2 billion is spent each year across the country to treat oral cancer.² We do not have a safety net for dental services for adults in Kansas, because there is no coverage for dental services in the Kansas Medicaid program. As Lt. Governor Colyer has pointed out during the transition to KanCare, the Kansas Medicaid program costs are growing. Preventing Kansans from acquiring oral cancer can only help keep the Medicaid costs down.

Reduction in the Use of Smokeless Tobacco

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, the most common users of smokeless tobacco are young adults between the ages of 18 and 25.¹

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids estimates the number of young people using smokeless tobacco would decrease by 44.2% per year if the tobacco tax is increased. The Campaign further estimates that overall use of other tobacco products would decrease by 23.8% per year if the tax is increased. In following tobacco tax changes across the country, the Campaign notes that increasing tobacco taxes always brings in more state revenue than is lost from the reduction in people who use the tobacco products.⁴

We support SB 462 because it offers our state the chance to reduce the number of citizens who will be diagnosed with and possibly die from oral cancer. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

¹ American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
<http://www.entnet.org/HealthInformation/Smokeless-Tobacco.cfm>

² Oral Cancer Foundation <http://oralcancerfoundation.org/facts/>

³ MD Anderson Cancer Center <http://www.mdanderson.org/patient-and-cancer-information/cancer-information/cancer-types/oral-cancer/prevention/index.html>

⁴ Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/>