

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2012, the Kansas Bureau of Oral Health and Oral Health Kansas conducted an oral health survey of 540 Kansas elders living in 20 nursing facilities. The survey was based on a nationally recognized protocol and consisted of a clinical oral health screening and a resident questionnaire. Dental hygienist screeners collected information on the presence of teeth and dentures, untreated dental decay, severe gingivitis, tooth mobility, and presence of oral debris. The questionnaire asked the resident (or their guardian if necessary) about their daily oral care, access to dental treatment, and insurance status. This is the first survey of its kind to be conducted in Kansas, providing valuable information about the oral health of this growing segment of the state's population.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- **One-Third of Nursing Facility Residents Have Lost All of Their Natural Teeth**

When a person loses all of their natural teeth it affects their appearance and their ability to eat and speak. One third of nursing facility residents in this study had no natural teeth, and an additional 43.7% had lost some, but not all of their teeth. This is significantly higher than the 17.4% of seniors living independently in the community who have lost all of their natural teeth.

- **Nursing Facility Residents Have Had Significant Dental Care In the Past, But Now Have Untreated Dental Disease**

Over one-third of nursing facility residents had untreated dental decay. The screeners noted a large amount of past dental work (crowns, bridges, partial dentures) in the resident's mouths. This indicates past access and investment in professional dental care. The presence of current untreated dental disease suggests that this level of care has not continued in their current life situation.

- **Nursing Facility Residents Have Poor Oral Hygiene**

Daily brushing and flossing removes the bacteria and plaque that irritates gums and leads to inflammation (gingivitis) and periodontal disease. 26% of surveyed residents had severe gingival inflammation, meaning that the gums were swollen, bleeding, and/or painful. 29% had substantial oral debris on at least two-thirds of their teeth. 15% of the residents had natural teeth that were loose. Taken together, these indicators suggest that many nursing facility residents are not removing the plaque and bacteria from their teeth on a regular basis.

- **Nursing Facility Residents Have Limited Financial Resources for Dental Care**

Medicare (the federal governmental health insurance program for Americans over 65) does not cover preventive and restorative professional dental services or dentures. Kansas Medicaid (the state and federal health insurance program for the poor and disabled) offers minimal dental benefits for adults. 66% of the surveyed residents were on Kansas Medicaid. Professional dental care is an out of pocket expense for most seniors, and this a barrier to care for many on limited incomes.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Ensure That Nursing Facilities Residents Receive Daily Preventive Care**
- **Improve Access to Oral Care by Creating More Mobile Programs in Nursing Facilities**
- **Ensure Sustainability of these Programs Through a Reliable Payment Source for Dental Care**

Improving the oral health of nursing facility residents will require a multi-pronged approach. Nursing facilities must monitor residents to ensure they are receiving adequate daily oral care and to identify oral health needs that require professional attention. Access to dental professionals must be physically and financially feasible. All three components are necessary to see impactful and sustainable improvement in the oral health of this population.

Children & Seniors

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Attachment 7