



Dental Public Health Activities Descriptive Summaries

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Kansas Dental Workforce Study

The supply of dentists and the way in which dental practices operate significantly affect the level of care that Kansans receive. A study of the dental workforce was commissioned by the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund and conducted by the Kansas Health Institute. The Kansas Health Institute, an independent, nonprofit organization based in Topeka, Kansas, conducts research and policy analysis on issues that affect the health of Kansans. The dental workforce study shows that a persistent disparity in the supply of dentists between rural and urban areas and the manner in which services are delivered are adversely affecting the oral health of rural Kansans. Further, the oral health of poor Kansans is suffering because of a lack of access to dental care. The study's findings are provided in a full report, called *The Declining Supply of Dental Services in Kansas: Implications for Access and Options for Reform* (January 2005). The report is available on the Kansas Health Institute Web site (www.khi.org). This report includes an assessment of oral health care needs among Kansans, an examination of the impact of oral health needs on overall health and well-being, a description of the impact of regulation and education requirements and programs on the supply of dentists, a baseline projection of the number of dentists and their relationship to the total population, an analysis of the supply of dental services and the relationship between workforce policies and oral health needs, and a summary of policy options that might have an impact on levels of access to dental services in the state. Major findings of the Kansas dental workforce study include:

- Many poor and rural Kansans lag significantly behind a rising standard of dental care and oral health.
- These gaps in services and care are caused in part by a limited supply of dentists – especially in rural areas.
- Without policy intervention, these service gaps and resulting oral health problems will grow as the supply of dentists declines.
- State policies and workforce regulations help determine the supply of dentists and the contributions of other dental professionals to the overall supply of services.
- To improve access to dental services policymakers could attempt to increase the supply of dentists, target services towards underserved populations of the state, and/or support the development of new dental practice models, including expanding the types of services that hygienists and other allied professionals can provide.
- Dental workforce needs are difficult to predict and can take many years to address, suggesting the need for policymakers to monitor the dental workforce and update policies on an ongoing basis.

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