

Health Happenings



Kansas Health Foundation

August 2010

“What we’ve achieved by working together is just really dramatic. It really has made a difference in access to dental health services across the state, and you don’t always see that. These are pretty wonderful accomplishments that none of us could have achieved by just trying to do it with our own resources.”

Robert Stiles, primary care office director at the Kansas Department of Health and Environment

Jason Wesco used to stare at the state map on his office wall and wonder how to get dental care to people in need all across Kansas.

This shortage of oral health care is complex and widespread. Ten Kansas counties have no dentist at all. Several areas of our state lack dentists who will accept Medicaid or HealthWave. And many of the Kansans who need help the most cannot afford to travel to other counties for dental services.

Over time, Wesco came up with an idea to create a dental treatment base, or hub, at existing safety net clinics in every region of Kansas. Some dental staff at each hub would then take mobile equipment throughout the region to provide screenings and care at temporary sites, or spokes, such as schools and nursing homes. Patients at spokes who needed more extensive treatment would be sent to the regional hub.

But Wesco, who was then working at the Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved, knew he would need a lot of help to turn his Dental Hubs and Spokes idea into reality.

Typically, health foundations each have different rules and timetables for funding projects, but Kansas foundations have forged partnerships on a number of initiatives to improve

the health of our state. So in 2007, Wesco asked every major health funder in Kansas to meet on this issue. Working together, these groups all agreed on a funding process that would pool \$6.1 million together for Dental Hubs and Spokes.

“The Kansas Health Foundation strongly believes in the power of partnerships to help us reach our goal of improving the health of all Kansans,” said Steve Coen, president and CEO of the Kansas Health Foundation. “Dental Hubs and Spokes is a great example of how partnerships like these can step up and address an urgent need.”

The Kansas Health Foundation contributed \$1 million to the project, while other groups gave the following amounts: United Methodist Health Ministry Fund, \$1.25 million; Kansas Department of Health and Environment, \$1.5 million; Sunflower Foundation, \$800,000; Jones Foundation, \$574,000; Delta Dental Foundation, \$563,000; and REACH Healthcare Foundation, \$425,000.

“As far as we know, it’s the only private-public partnership like this in the country,” says Cathy Harding, executive director for KAMU.

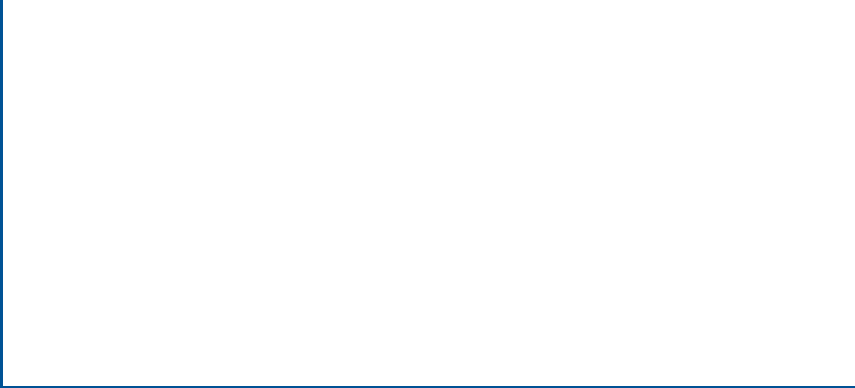
Since Dental Hubs and Spokes began 3 years ago, hubs have been created in Lyon, Crawford, Geary, Sedgwick,

Saline, Reno, Ellis and Finney counties. Now, in the program’s final year of funding, those eight hubs provide dental services in 74 Kansas counties.

These Hubs and Spokes receive payments from Medicaid and HealthWave, helping them to reach the goal of becoming financially self-sustaining after 3 years. Best of all, this program has made significant improvements in the health of thousands of Kansans, including many of the state’s youngest residents.

“This project has resulted in more than a 200 percent increase in the number of dental exams by our safety net clinics,” Harding says. “That’s a direct result of this funding. It would have taken us years to make this kind of progress without this program.”





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HealthHappenings

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Bridging the dental gap

Throw a dart at a map of Kansas and you're likely to hit a part of the state that has desperate dental needs.

So desperate that when volunteer dentists visit their area, hundreds of Kansans line up at midnight for care, even when they have to stand in a snowstorm. So desperate that others just drink whiskey before pulling their own teeth.

Three years ago, the state and its health foundations joined forces to battle this crisis by funding a unique program that's spreading affordable dental care across Kansas.