

**Testimony**  
**Health Services Committee**  
**Tuesday, August 18, 2015 – 9:25 a.m.**  
**North Dakota Department of Health**

Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the Health Services Committee. My name is Kim Mertz and I am the Director of the Division of Family Health for the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here today to provide testimony regarding programs and services that provide dental services in rural areas of the state and to underserved populations. Dental programs available through the department include:

Donated Dental Services Program

Supported through state general funding (\$50,000 per biennium), the Donated Dental Services Program provides dental care through a network of 135 North Dakota volunteer dentists and 12 dental laboratories to the state's most vulnerable people- the disabled, elderly or medically-compromised individuals who cannot afford necessary treatment. The program is a partnership between the North Dakota Department of Health and the Dental Lifeline Network. Since the program's inception in 1998, 742 North Dakota residents have received more than \$2.5 million in donated dental services.

Smiles For Life Fluoride Varnish Program

During the 2007 legislative session, HB 1293 was passed, which gave physicians, advanced practice registered nurses, physician assistants, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses the ability to apply fluoride varnish upon the completion of a fluoride varnish curriculum approved by the North Dakota Board of Dental Examiners. Smiles for Life (module 6) is the current, on-line oral health training curriculum approved for this program. Since 2008, many local public health units and Head Start entities have applied fluoride varnish to children's teeth. In 2014, outreach and training was provided to medical clinics, and, as a result, 54 clinics have been trained in the application of fluoride varnish. Funding for this program is provided by a DentaQuest Foundation Grant.

School-based Fluoride Varnish and Seal!ND (Sealant) Program

In 2009, HB 1176 was passed, which allowed licensed dental hygienists to perform procedures authorized in advance by a dentist. As a result of this legislation, the North Dakota Department of Health, Oral Health Program, implemented a school-based fluoride varnish and sealant program (Seal!ND). Services include an initial screening, sealant placement and fluoride varnish application. Schools with 45 percent or greater of their students on the free and reduced-fee school lunch program are given priority for the program. This criterion helps to reach underserved children who may otherwise be unable to receive dental screening and dental sealants to help prevent tooth decay. Since 2011, public health hygienists funded by the department have served about 4,500 students through this program. During the upcoming 2015-16 school year, the program will be providing services in approximately 40 schools throughout the state. Funding for the

Seal!ND Program is provided through a Center for Prevention and Control (CDC) Oral Disease Prevention Program Grant and a Health Resources and Services Administrative (HRSA) Oral Health Workforce Grant.

The Oral Health Program has also been partnering with private dentists to increase services within schools. In the fall of 2014, Dr. Jackie Nord joined the school-based oral health program to provide preventative oral health services in three schools in Grand Forks. Dr. Nord is able to bill Medicaid for the services provided. To assist Dr. Nord with delivering these services, the Oral Health Program provided her with portable dental equipment.

#### Ronald McDonald Care Mobile (RMCM)

The Oral Health Program partners with the RMCM to provide services to rural and underserved populations. The RMCM, a mobile dental clinic, began operation in 2012 and serves the western half of ND. Their priority areas for service include schools with 40 percent or greater of their student population on the free and reduced-fee school lunch program, Head Start and Early Head Start, American Indian Reservation areas, and community health centers without dental services. In 2014, the care mobile served 1,008 children with 2,166 patient appointments, providing 9,293 dental services for a total value of \$477,896. The care mobile is currently booking into 2017. The Oral Health Program provides funding to the care mobile through the HRSA Oral Health Workforce Grant to provide additional services in reservation areas.

#### Older Adult Programs

The Oral Health Program partners with Bridging the Dental Gap (BDG), a safety-net dental clinic in Bismarck, to provide services to older adults living in long-term care facilities. The Mission of BDG is "To Provide Access to Dental Care for Underserved Populations in North Dakota." BDG provides services in St. Vincent's, Sunset Care Center, Missouri Slope and the Baptist Center in the Bismarck/Mandan area. To date, BDG has provided oral health care services to 266 residents within these four facilities. Funding for this program is provided through the HRSA Oral Health Workforce Grant.

Northland Community Health Center implemented an older adult program in June 2014 at three facilities: Benedictine Living Center in Garrison; the Garrison Memorial Hospital (swing bed facility with long term beds available); and the Community Memorial Hospital in Turtle Lake (swing bed facility with long term beds available). Oral health services have been provided to 35 residents within these three facilities. Funding for this program is supported by a DentaQuest Foundation Grant.

This concludes my presentation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.