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EDITORIAL

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Kansas is facing a serious shortage in the dental workforce. Registered Dental Therapists are a common sense, cost effective solution to this problem. Currently, hundreds of thousands of Kansans lack access to dental care. Vulnerable Kansans, including the elderly, people with disabilities and children, are principally affected.

Lack of access to dental care is an issue that ECKAN knows about all too well. In 2016, ECKAN helped facilitate needed dental care for 428 of its customers in a seven county coverage area (Anderson, Coffey, Douglas, Franklin, Lyon, Osage and Miami counties). Despite having adequate financial resources in place, this service proved itself to be quite challenging.

We discovered, early in our planning, that many of the rural and even some of the more populated communities that we serve, do not have dental providers. As such, in addition to helping our customers with the costs of dental care, we also had to arrange transportation to dental providers that were as far as 75 miles away from our customers' communities. Some of the funds that we had originally planned to use for dental services had to be used for transportation instead. To complicate things further, though we were able to issue gas vouchers to many of our customers, some of the folks did not have adequate transportation to make the drive.

Much like Physicians Assistants and Nurse Practitioners did in addressing the medical workforce shortage, Registered Dental Therapists would help alleviate the shortage in the dental workforce. Approving Dental Therapists to work in Kansas would provide Kansans with greater access to much needed dental care. This issue is not new – it is something the Kansas Legislature has discussed over the course of the past couple of years. Now is the time, with the Legislature returning to the Statehouse in Topeka, for lawmakers to make dental care a priority in Kansas.

Submitted by,

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