

Testimony
House Bill 1567
House Human Service Committee,
Monday, January 27, 2025
Rolette County Public Health District

Good morning, Chairman Ruby and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Barbara Frydenlund, I am a Registered Nurse and the administrator of Rolette County Public Health.

House Bill 1567 is very dear to my heart, and I encourage action on this bill.

Rolette County Public Health District has historically had the largest Medicaid Health Tracks program in North Dakota. Access to dental care for children and adults on Medicaid is at a critical level within our service area and the state of North Dakota. Our staff directly assists families in making dental appointments for children that we see in our Health Tracks program and all too often we fail because of lack of providers willing to accept Medicaid clients or restrict greatly the number of Medicaid clients that they will accept into their practice.

During 2024, 48% of the children participating in our Health Tracks program had an immediate need to see a dentist or do not have a dental home. We are extremely limited in local dental appointment availability and the waiting time for Indian Health Service Dental is extreme and complicated for families. If we are lucky, we may be able to seek appointments in a larger city such as Bismarck or Minot, but the wait is long, and transportation often is a barrier to getting to appointments resulting in the child not obtaining the service and often restricted from further appointments with that clinic. Many of the children we see in our clinic need a pediatric dentist who can provide anesthesia as the magnitude of the dental care needed is beyond what can be completed in a dental chair. Most of our Health Tracks participants are American Indian.

The staff of Rolette County Public Health offers fluoride varnish to all our clients with the consent of the parent/guardian. We average 80-90% uptake on the varnish application. The 10-20% that decline the service state that the child received the varnish at a recent dental appointment. We also apply fluoride varnish to school age children in the school setting, again with consent. The fluoride varnish strengthens the existing teeth making them more decay resistant, slows the progression of existing cavities and eases some of the pain that maybe present.

Dental caries can be a serious health threat to both children and adults. Many of our children have as many cavities as they have teeth. These very large cavities cause pain, causing problems with eating, speaking, playing and learning. A child with tooth pain is not going to be attentive in school, leading to learning and behavioral concerns. If the cavity reaches the nerve an abscess can form, and the infection can be spread throughout the body. Oral health of an individual is considered indicative of the overall health.

We understand that the Ronald McDonald Dental Mobile can't begin to serve the number of children in need of dental services.

Rolette County Public Health has three suggestions for the improvement of the dental crisis that we are facing.

1. Mid-level dental providers. *Equivalent to Physician Assistances and Nurse Practitioners who with our rural health care would be even a greater disparity.*
2. The opportunity for Dental Hygienists to work independently from a dentist, to provide cleanings, sealants and fluoride varnish in public health offices and schools-----funding would be required for this option
3. Increase in mobile dental services

In 2021 we purchased a 38-foot mobile clinic, complete with two exam rooms. The purpose of our mobile clinic is to provide public health services in locations within our county where we do not have physical public health office space.

As we look locally for solutions to the dental access crisis, Rolette County Public Health would like to propose that as a pilot project, the North Dakota legislature provide funding to transform one exam room of our mobile clinic into a dental suite to provide preventive dental services and simple fillings and extractions. In addition to the mobile clinic transformation, we would need state funding to cover the costs of this venture, including staff members. Our suggestion would be to start with very young children, with the goal of preventing the dental disasters that we are now seeing.

I thank you greatly for looking into the dental crisis for the most vulnerable citizens of our state. Please keep in mind that this includes both children and adults.

Sincerely,

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 Administrator
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