

## ***Report: Dental care a struggle for farmers***

### **High costs leave some families without oral health coverage, union leader says**

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**More than 42 percent of farmers in several Midwestern states are without dental insurance, a statistic one Hutchinson health official says probably is similar in Kansas.**

**Kim Moore, president of the Hutchinson-based United Methodist Health Ministry Fund also said a 2006 Kansas survey conducted by The Access Project showed 51 percent of Kansas farm families reporting medical debt owed money to dentists.**

**About four in 10 of those with medical debt had delayed a visit to the dentist.**

**"Whether looked at through the financial lens of medical debt or the health lens of access to effective treatment, we get the same picture," Moore said during a conference call with officials from The Access Project Wednesday morning. "The costs of dental care are exceeding families' resources to pay for them and resulting in delayed care and financial burden."**

**The Access Project's report is the fourth in a series of issue briefs based on a 2007 survey of farm and ranch operators in Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota. The Access Project and its partners at Brandeis University and the University of North Dakota School of Medicine's Center for Rural Health contracted with the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service to survey more than 2,000 non-corporate farm and ranch operators.**

**Moore, along with Carol Pryor, report author and Access Project policy director, announced the report during the teleconference with reporters Wednesday. Both reiterated that the findings raise questions regarding the structure of health insurance coverage and urged policymakers to consider including oral health care issues when discussing national health care reform this session.**

**Moore said there isn't an organization that pushes oral health issues to Congress.**

**"Often, dental services are viewed by policymakers as some type of optional health care expenditure," he said. "The mouth is part of the body is a constant refrain we have to make.**

**"The maintenance of good oral health requires access to dental care and that is obviously in question for many people in our Midwestern states."**

**Pryor said one of the farmer respondents said he already was spending thousands on medical costs because of several health conditions, including osteoporosis. His teeth are decaying, but he hasn't gone to the dentist because he fears the amount of out-of-pocket expenses.**

**His son already has had more than \$1,000 in dental work done in recent years.**

**The outcome of the study didn't surprise Donn Teske, president of the Kansas Farmers Union.**

**He said with the added costs of dental insurance a high number of farmers and ranchers are without coverage. Some, he said, can take advantage of a spouse's medical and dental insurances through the work.**

**National Farmers Union delegates in March also adopted a special order of business calling on policymakers to consider the unique challenges facing rural America when debating policy solutions to the nation's health care system. Teske said KFU adopted a similar policy in January.**

**KFU helped participate in a rural health care survey in 2006 with The Access Project. That survey showed 17 percent of the Kansas group's membership had medical debt, even though they had medical insurance, Teske said.**

**He said he received an e-mail just recently from a Kansas rancher who told him she needed dental work done.**

**The woman said she had plenty of other things around the farm to fix first.**

**"She said she had to buy feed for the cows, too," he said.**