



TO: Members of the Joint Finance Committee
FROM: Pamela Fraser, Director, Oral Health Services, Children's Wisconsin
DATE: April 5, 2023
RE: Support for funding to expand Children's Wisconsin Dental Clinic

My name is Pamela Fraser and I am the director of oral health services at Children's Wisconsin. I'm here today to encourage your support for our request for matching funds to support the expansion of the Dental Clinic on our main campus.

Many of you are familiar with Children's Wisconsin and the high quality, specialty pediatric care and community programs and services we offer across the state to support kids and families with their health and well-being. Oral health is an important component of overall health – in fact, dental concerns are one of the top reasons that kids miss school. Untreated cavities impact a child's ability to eat, speak, sleep, socialize and learn – it can lead to preventable emergency department visits and hospitalizations. Poor oral health as a child has significant consequences on adult health, creating a disposition for other chronic and costly health conditions.

Children's is one of the largest providers of pediatric oral health care in Wisconsin. In 2022, approximately 22,000 patients were seen across our four dental clinics. Our largest clinic is located on Children's main campus adjacent to the hospital and near our other pediatric medical specialists. At this location, we provide comprehensive preventive care like regular check-ups, cleanings and fluoride. We also offer restorative services and orthodontics, treat dental trauma and perform dental surgery in Children's operating room. Our main campus dental clinic is especially important for patients with complex health conditions or special health care needs. We are one of only a few dental clinics in the state with providers who are skilled in caring for these patients' unique needs. Families from nearly 60 counties across the state travel to Children's to receive dental care for their kids to ensure they receive safe, efficient and compassionate care. Caring for kids with complex health issues not only requires specific expertise, but also additional time and resources.

In addition to providing care, Children's is proud to serve as the state's only pediatric dental residency program. Over the last 10 years, we have trained nearly 50 pediatric dental residents with many now working in Wisconsin communities – from Chippewa Falls, to Appleton, to Racine and beyond. The highly competitive two-year program provides residents with comprehensive education and clinical training, including developing skills to care for our most underserved children and those with complex medical needs.

Perhaps most significant to our request for state support is that more than 90 percent of Children's dental patients are covered by Medicaid. Additionally, approximately 35 percent of our patients have special health care needs. This includes caring for 800 now adult patients who grew up receiving care at Children's. Even though more than 1 million Wisconsinites receive dental coverage through Medicaid, many still struggle to find a local provider. As a safety net provider of oral health services, the demand for our care is high with as many as 4,000 new patients currently waiting for appointments. If we can serve more patients earlier with preventive oral health care, we hope to prevent more significant oral health issues that often require more costly interventions.

In fact, due to the current space constraints of the clinic and the very high demand for our services, it often takes at least six months or longer for a patient to establish dental care at Children's. Expanding and redesigning the clinic will allow for the recruitment of more dental providers, who will enable us to dramatically increase the number of children and families we are able to serve and help close the gap for those currently waiting for care.

It will provide the opportunity to offer new and innovative services currently unavailable and improve the overall patient and family experience through an enhanced environment. Plans include sensory accommodations, larger treatment areas to care for patients with special health care needs, a dedicated space to care for infants and toddlers with cranio-facial anomalies like cleft lip and palate, additional training spaces as well as a special treatment and recovery area for anesthesia-led services enabling us to keep many patients from going to the hospital for care.

We ask you to join Children's and our generous donors, including the Delta Dental of Wisconsin Foundation, to invest in helping us serve those – who without us – would not get the care they need or deserve. I respectfully ask for your support of one-time funding of \$4.79 million to expand Children's Wisconsin's Dental Clinic to provide more access to these services.

In closing, I'd like to share perspectives from some of the families we serve. Amy, mom of nine-year-old Lici from Racine, shares that she could not find a dental provider near her home who would care for Lici due to her complex health needs. Amy appreciates that the team at Children's is familiar with Lici's needs, is thorough and explains things clearly and provides safe and appropriate care for her. Like Amy, Terry, mom of 11-year-old Addie, from Little Chute, says she had trouble finding a dental provider in their community who accepts Medicaid insurance and has expertise in caring for kids with special health care needs. It brings Terry relief knowing Children's dental providers are there to give Addie the best and safest care she deserves and to coordinate with her other medical specialists. Christine in Milwaukee has 12-year-old triplets who all receive dental care at Children's. Her son Jasper, who has quadriplegic cerebral palsy, sees a dentist trained to care for his unique needs. Christine feels so much confidence in the dental providers at Children's and appreciates the coordinated approach, and convenience, of being able to have dental care for her three children in one place.

The state's investment in helping support our Dental Clinic expansion will allow us to give the same quality of care we give Lici, Addie and Jasper to thousands of other kids in the state. We also believe that expanding access to this care will allow more kids to receive regular oral health care reducing costlier visits to emergency rooms or procedures needing to be done in an operating room due to the severity of the case. Investing in safety net providers like Children's Wisconsin is a smart investment for both our kids and the state.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today and I'm glad to answer any questions now or in the future.

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