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Contact: Katie Mintz
Communications
651-431-5605
Kathryn.Mintz@state.mn.us

Commissioner Jesson, Sen. Rosen promote increased access to dental care during National Children’s Dental Health Month

FAIRMONT, Minn. – Minnesota Department of Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson and Sen. Julie Rosen today visited the office of dentist Dr. Thomas Larson, DDS, in Fairmont to discuss the importance of access to dental for Minnesota children and families, especially in greater Minnesota.

Access to dental care in greater Minnesota is a problem for many residents, but especially those who receive services under public health care programs. Minnesota ranks below the national average on important measures of children’s dental services, including children’s preventative care. In 2013, only about 38 percent of children on Minnesota Health Care Programs had a preventive dental visit.

“While overall our public programs provide quality care to many Minnesotans, we have a huge gap when it comes to dental access,” said Jesson. “This means not only are thousands of children and families not getting dental care, but their overall health can be impacted, as oral health and systemic health are closely related. We need to make sure all Minnesotans, especially children, get the care they need to stay healthy.”

Under a proposal by Gov. Mark Dayton, over the next biennium, an estimated 10,000 more kids and 3,000 more adults will get access to dental services. The governor’s \$10 million oral health initiative would increase rates for dentists who accept public program clients by 15 percent, encouraging more to serve Minnesota Health Care Programs recipients, as Dr. Larson of Fairmont has done for many years. The proposal would also better align payment for dental services to outcomes, and improve care for adults on public programs by adding periodontal coverage.

“Access to, or lack of proper dental care has received increased attention at the Capitol. I am honored to be working with the stakeholders on this to find solutions for this critical problem,” said Sen. Rosen.

February is National Children’s Dental Health Month.