

Cuts in dental service will have devastating impact

Minnesota lawmakers have a challenge this year unlike any year in recent memory.

That reality was reinforced when I attended a legislative town hall meeting on the governor's proposed budget cuts on Feb. 20 in the Duluth City Council Chambers ("Duluth City Hall crowd tells legislators what's wrong with Pawlenty's budget," Feb. 21).

As a practicing dentist in Duluth, I know the proposed budget cuts in dental services will have a devastating impact on those whose oral health is most fragile. If dental care for needy adults is eliminated, as proposed, many people in our community will be forced into emergency rooms. This is an expensive and inefficient use of hospital ERs.

Ironically, the funds to provide this care exist, even in this tight economy. Dentists pay about \$35 million each year in health-care taxes to provide dental services to needy populations. But the governor wants to shift these tax dollars to the general fund.

I hope our lawmakers will wisely retain funding for these dental programs. And act before it becomes more painful and more expensive to all of us to repair.

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