Oral Health Access Strategic Plan 2017-2020

Providing Dental Care for
All in Santa Cruz County

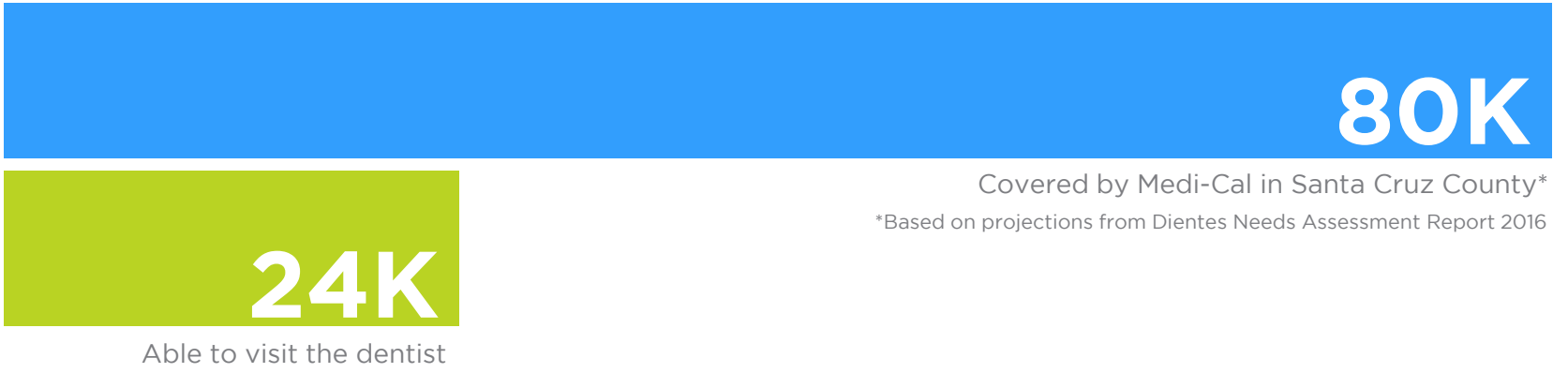
Oral Health Access
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

It may look like everyone is covered, but you have to look deeper

In 2016, Dientes Community Dental Care commissioned the first-ever Santa Cruz County Oral Health Needs Assessment.

The results were startling.

Insurance does not equal access



Covered by Medi-Cal in Santa Cruz County*

*Based on projections from Dientes Needs Assessment Report 2016

Able to visit the dentist

In Santa Cruz County:

- Less than 1 out of 3 eligible Medi-Cal** patients visited the dentist, including only 18% of working age adults
- 24% of Pre-K children screened had evidence of untreated dental decay

These statistics don't include the tens of thousands of Santa Cruz County residents who don't have insurance, don't qualify for subsidized programs, and those on Medicare. In fact, most of those on Medicare have no dental benefits at all.

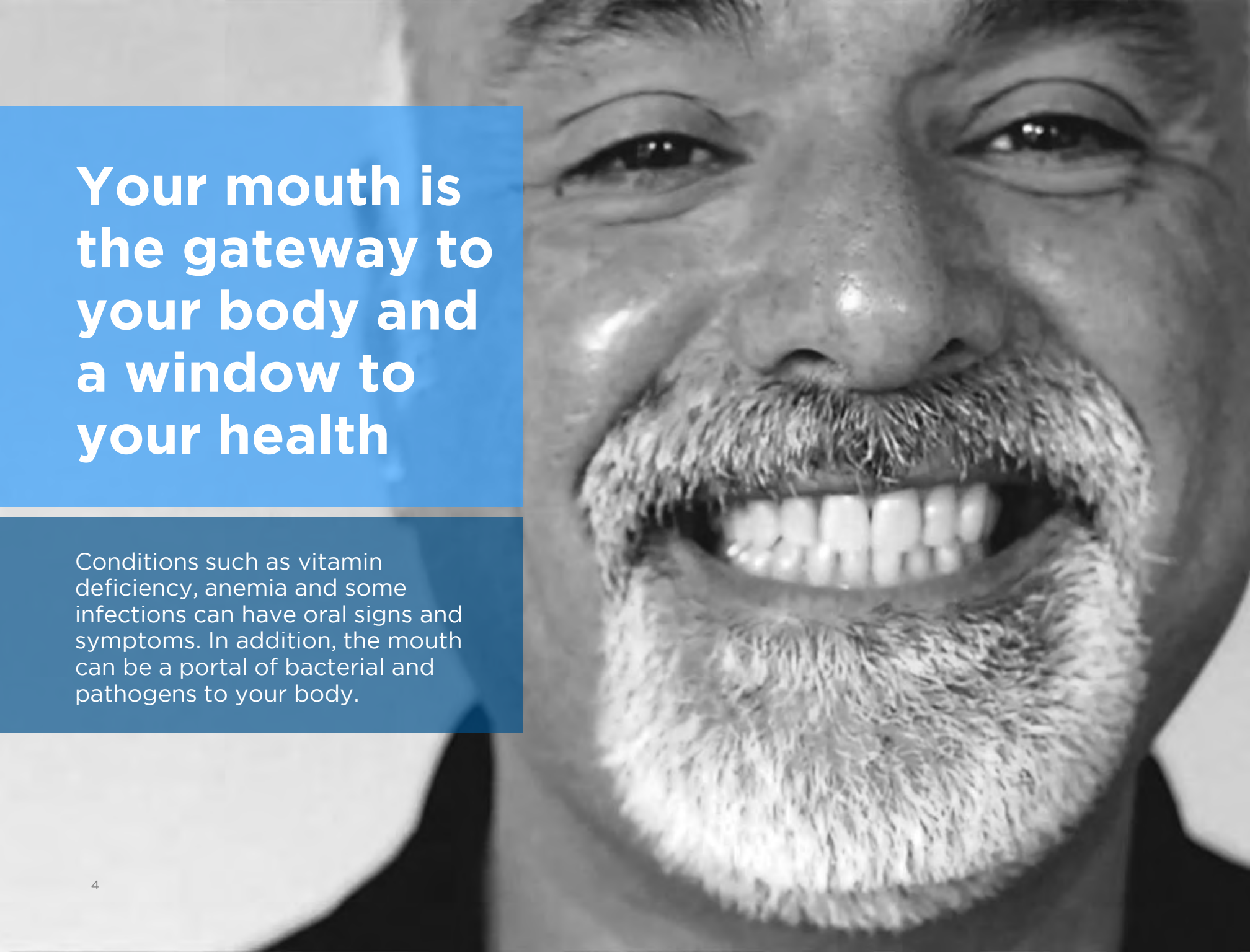
Overall, our community is not meeting the oral health needs of its low-income residents.

**Medi-Cal and Denti-Cal is used interchangeably throughout this document.

Why aren't people going to the dentist?

The community dental clinics who provide care to the majority of low-income patients are operating at full capacity. Only **10 private offices out of 58 in Santa Cruz County** take Denti-Cal, and only a few are accepting new patients. For specialty care, it's even worse.

The lack of adequate dental care access is unacceptable, especially because oral health impacts overall health, employment opportunities, and social connectedness.



Your mouth is the gateway to your body and a window to your health

Conditions such as vitamin deficiency, anemia and some infections can have oral signs and symptoms. In addition, the mouth can be a portal of bacterial and pathogens to your body.

If we believe in prevention, we have to believe in dental care

Studies have shown that poor oral health is associated with serious conditions such as diabetes, Alzheimer's, cardiovascular disease, and poor birth outcomes.

If untreated, dental issues like gum inflammation can cause damage to blood vessels and heart.

Increased access to childhood oral health care leads to a decrease in dental disease and restorative care later in life.

Dental disease is completely preventable

In most cases, dental disease is preventable with efforts such as oral health education, improvements in homecare, dental cleanings, fluoride treatments, and sealants.

Poor oral health can also have a profound psychosocial impact.

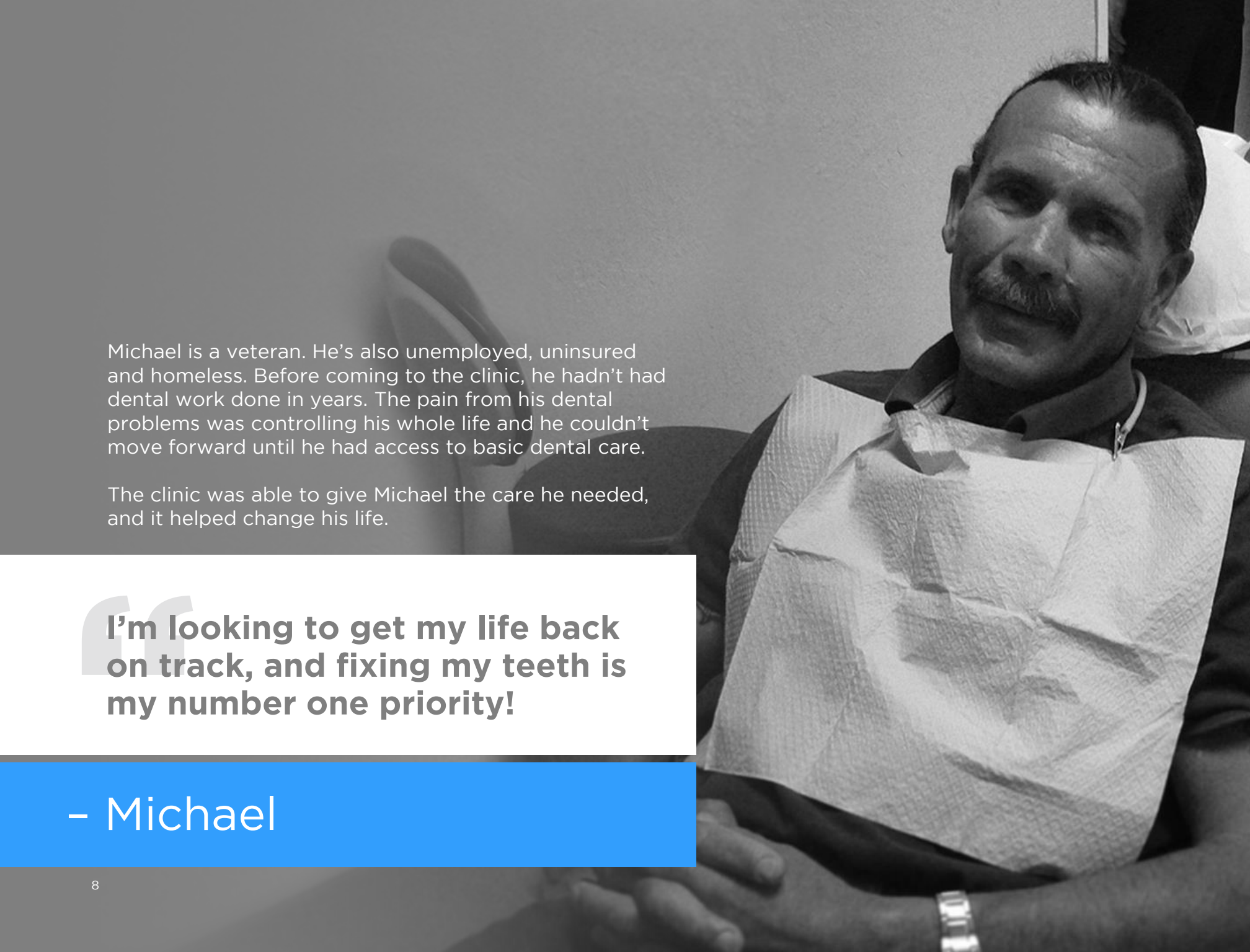
It directly affects people's confidence, whether kids get teased or speak up in school, as well as general social connectedness.

In addition, it affects whether people can find employment and, thus, stable housing.

In a 2006 study, researchers gave nearly 400 welfare recipients with severe dental problems oral healthcare. Those who completed their dental treatment were twice as likely to get jobs or move off of welfare than those who didn't.

"Customer service jobs, good entry-level jobs, they're not available to people who lack the basic ability to smile, to function, to chew properly.

– Lindsey Robinson
Former President, California Dental Association



Michael is a veteran. He's also unemployed, uninsured and homeless. Before coming to the clinic, he hadn't had dental work done in years. The pain from his dental problems was controlling his whole life and he couldn't move forward until he had access to basic dental care.

The clinic was able to give Michael the care he needed, and it helped change his life.

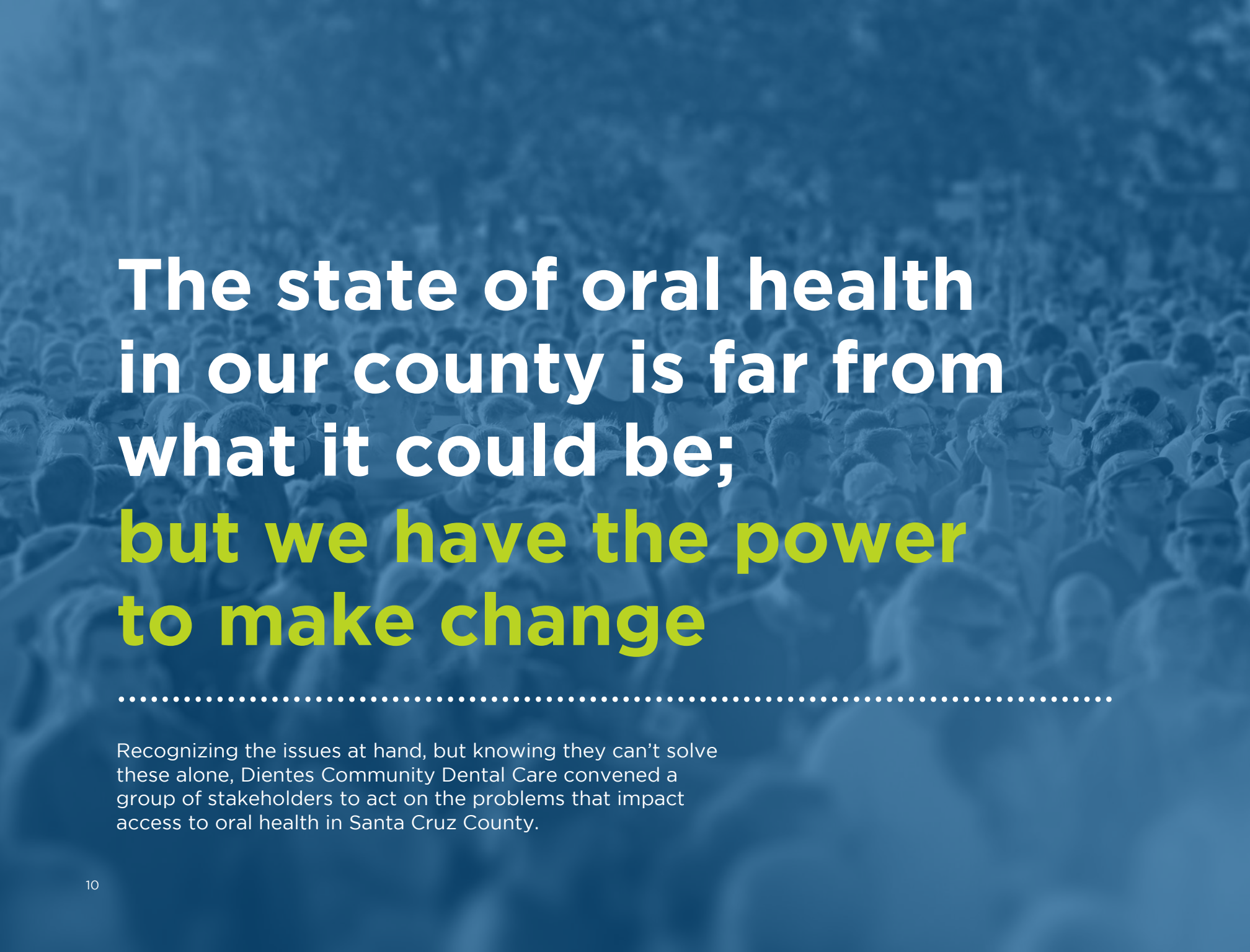
"I'm looking to get my life back on track, and fixing my teeth is my number one priority!

– Michael

We all care about our health.
But many people don't treat dental care with the same importance as general health care.

Skipping a baby's first check-up with their pediatrician is rare, but only 29.5% of dentists see children by the recommended first tooth or their first birthday.

Educating the public and the dental community about the benefits of good oral health habits could change the trajectory of thousands of kids' lives.



The state of oral health in our county is far from what it could be; but we have the power to make change

Recognizing the issues at hand, but knowing they can't solve these alone, Dientes Community Dental Care convened a group of stakeholders to act on the problems that impact access to oral health in Santa Cruz County.

Oral Health Access Steering Committee Members

The Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County Steering Committee is a group of 17 informed and impassioned leaders that represent the broad range of partnerships necessary to improve the oral health of Santa Cruz County residents. The Committee spearheaded the first ever Oral Health Access Strategic Plan for Santa Cruz County.

Sepi Walthard, DDS (chair)
Dental Director
Dientes Community Dental Care

Zach Friend (chair)
Supervisor
County of Santa Cruz

Nannette Benedict, DDS
Board Member
Monterey Bay Dental Society

David Brody, MM
Executive Director
First 5 Santa Cruz County

Javier Carrillo, MPH
Health Programs Manager
Central California Alliance for Health

Ceil Cirillo
Community Board Chair
Santa Cruz PAMF / Sutter Health

Randolph Cross, DDS
Dental Director
Salud Para La Gente

Mark Ebrahimian, DDS
County Director
Monterey Bay Dental Society

Leslie Goodfriend, MPH
Senior Health Services Manager
SCC Human Services Department

Kathleen King
Chief Executive Officer
Pajaro Valley Community Health Trust

Salem Magarian, MD
Pediatric Medical Director
Santa Cruz Community Health Centers

Cynthia Mathews
Mayor
City of Santa Cruz

Elisa Orona, MSPPM
Executive Director
Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz County

Amy Peeler, MPH
Chief of Clinics
County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency

Raquel Ramirez Ruiz
Senior Health Services Manager
County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency

Mark Stone
Assembly member
29th Assembly District

Michael Watkins
Superintendent of Schools
Santa Cruz County Office of Education

The Needs Assessment highlighted 12 recommendations that if implemented could affect change over the coming 3-4 years.

Recommendations for action

Ideas that could use some focus

Areas that we can target

The committee was tasked with reviewing the Needs Assessment and recommendations. They asked key questions to guide their discussions:

Which has the greatest potential impact?

Which would serve the highest number of patients?

What is feasible and realistic?

Does it change behavior?

What is the return on investment related to prevention?

Which recommendations lead to system improvements?

The initial 12 recommendations fell into four distinct buckets. Guided by these questions, the committee prioritized prevention, education and capacity.

The top 3 recommendations emerged and became the basis of the Oral Health Access Strategic Plan

1. Supporting oral health education and prevention with a **"First Tooth First Birthday"** campaign

2. Making **kindergarten or first grade dental screening mandatory** in Santa Cruz County schools

3. Expanding **treatment, prevention, and clinical capacity** in Santa Cruz County

GOAL 1: First Tooth First Birthday Education Campaign

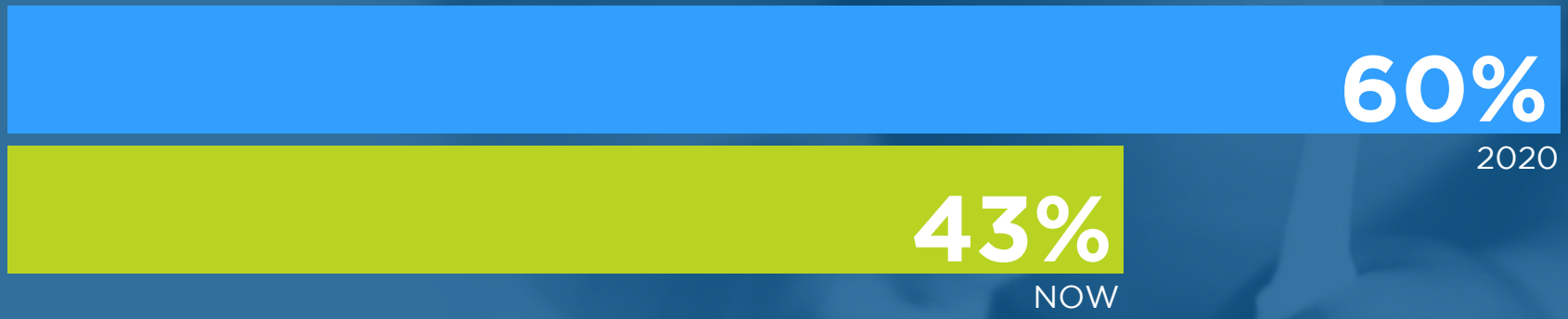
It's widely recommended by institutions such as the American Dental Association and American Academy of Pediatrics that children visit the dentist by their first birthday or by the time their first tooth comes in.

This program is about prevention and education, where local organizations promote consistent messages on an ongoing basis. These targeted messaging efforts will be supplemented with media programs aimed at spreading the word about the importance of First Tooth First Birthday dental Visits.

This program should move the needle **significantly by 2020, increasing Medi-Cal utilization rates for children ages 0–3 from 43% to 60%.**

Champions:

David Brody, Executive Director, First 5 Santa Cruz County
Javier Carrillo, Health Programs Manager, Central California Alliance for Health



GOAL 2: Mandatory Kindergarten or First Grade Oral Health Screenings

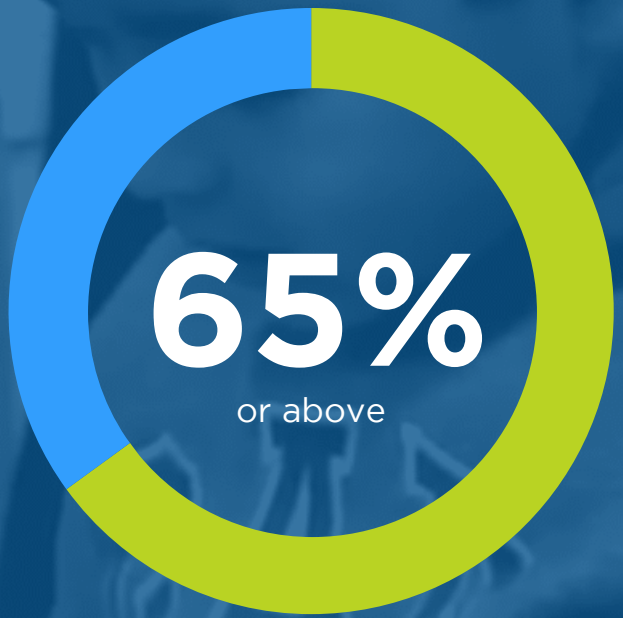
Kids with tooth decay are at a disadvantage as it disrupts the learning process, just as poor vision can.

Requiring kindergarten or first grade dental screenings can make a real, measurable difference to our local children, 30% of whom have never visited the dentist and 24% of whom show evidence of untreated dental decay.

This program will begin in the 2017-2018 school year, with the aim of **maintaining utilization for children ages 4-6 at 65% or above through 2020.**

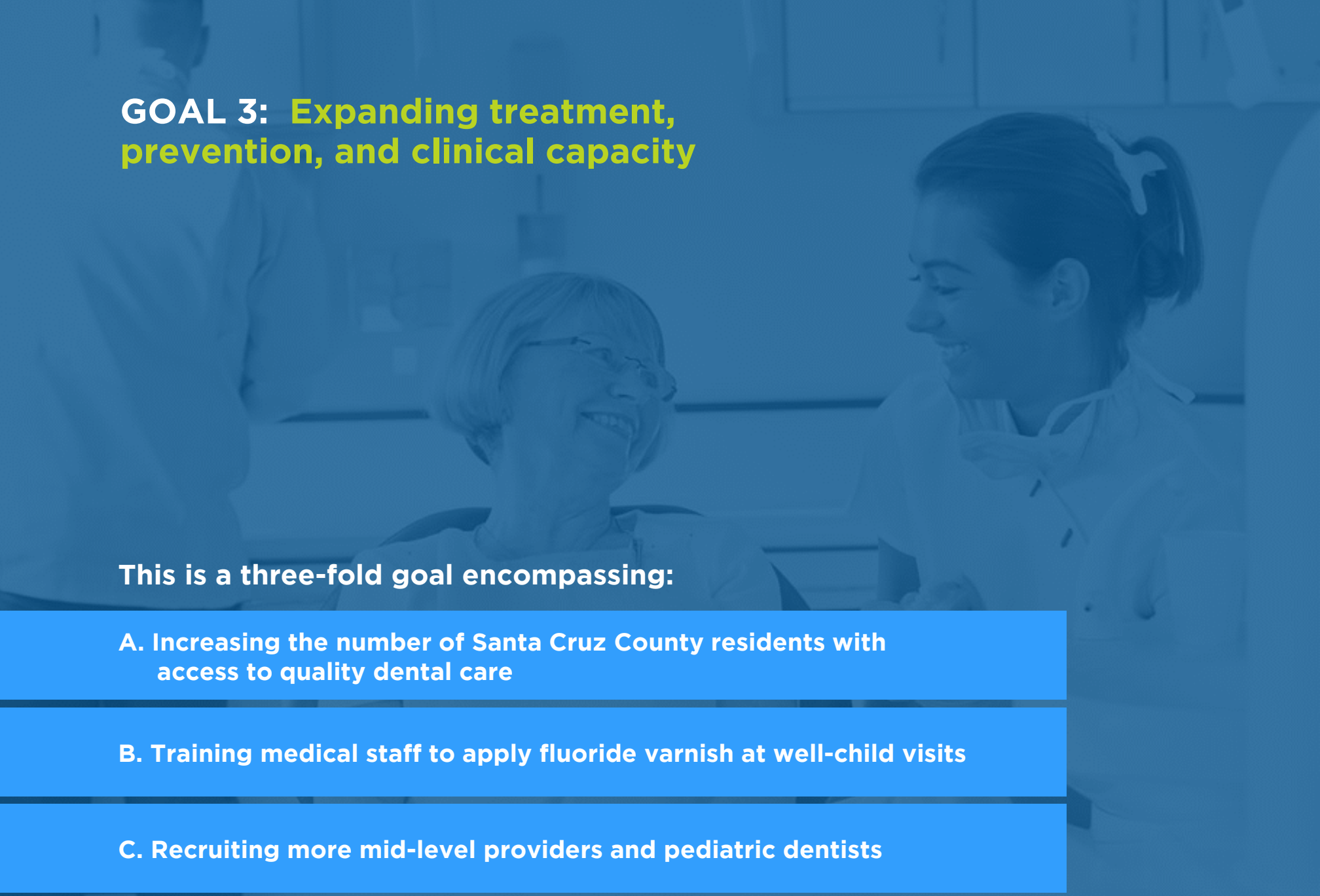
It includes providing public schools with forms for parents that explain their child must have a dental check up before they enter school.

Additionally, both Salud Para La Gente and Dientes Community Dental Care commit to accommodating these children into their schedules for oral exams, cleanings, and fluoride applications.



Champion:

Michael Watkins,
Superintendent of Schools, Santa Cruz County Office of Education



GOAL 3: Expanding treatment, prevention, and clinical capacity

This is a three-fold goal encompassing:

A. Increasing the number of Santa Cruz County residents with access to quality dental care

B. Training medical staff to apply fluoride varnish at well-child visits

C. Recruiting more mid-level providers and pediatric dentists

3A. Increase the number of Santa Cruz County residents with access to quality dental care.

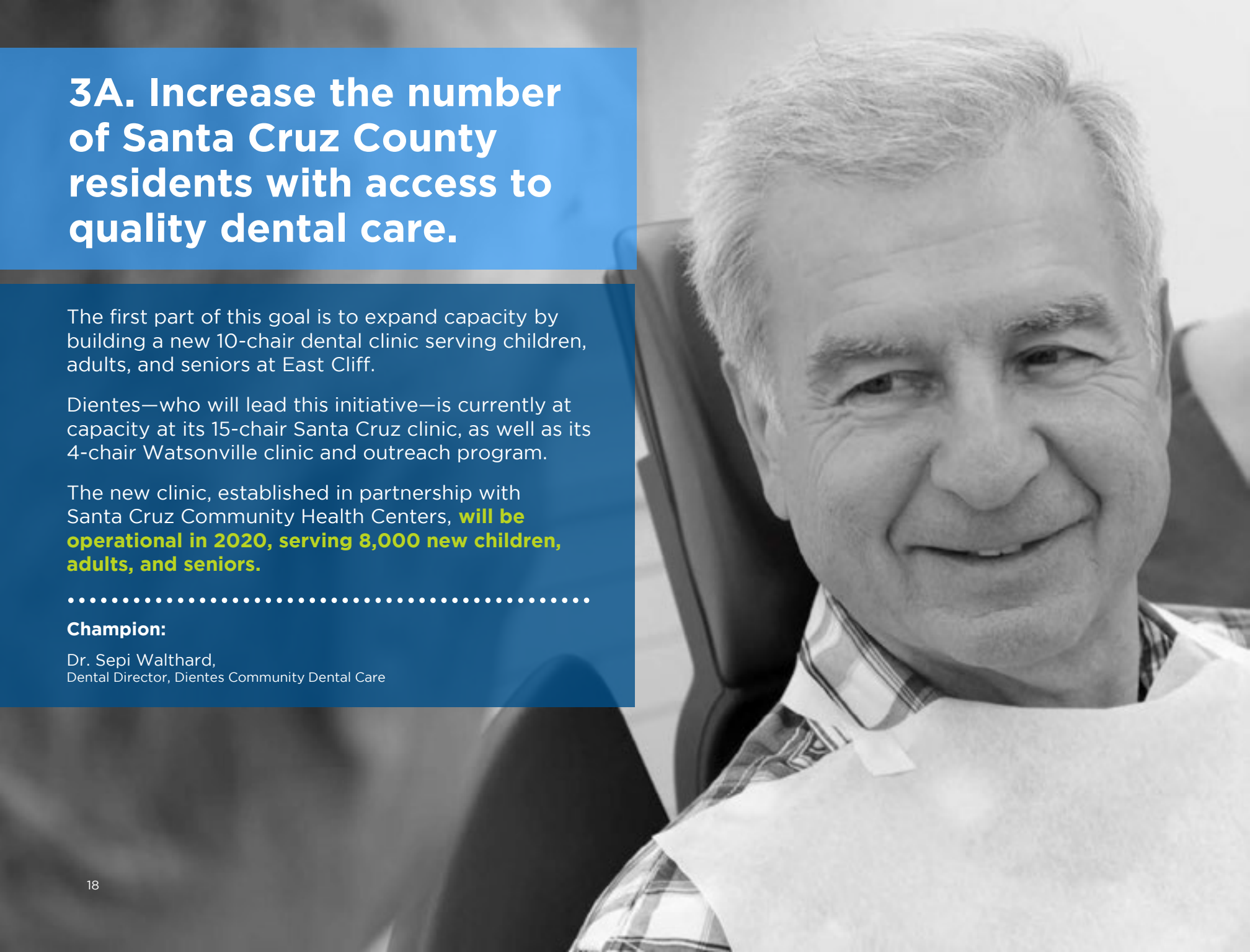
The first part of this goal is to expand capacity by building a new 10-chair dental clinic serving children, adults, and seniors at East Cliff.

Dientes—who will lead this initiative—is currently at capacity at its 15-chair Santa Cruz clinic, as well as its 4-chair Watsonville clinic and outreach program.

The new clinic, established in partnership with Santa Cruz Community Health Centers, **will be operational in 2020, serving 8,000 new children, adults, and seniors.**

Champion:

Dr. Sepi Walthard,
Dental Director, Dientes Community Dental Care



3B. Train medical staff to apply fluoride varnish at well-child visits

In 2014, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force began recommending that medical providers learn how to apply fluoride varnish to primary teeth starting with a child's first tooth through the age of 5; fluoride is found to reduce tooth decay by 20-40%.

Supporting this movement, Medi-Cal and children's insurance programs are increasingly reimbursing medical providers for fluoride varnish, oral risk assessment and screening, and parent/caretaker oral health education.

The need and desire to train pediatricians and medical assistants to apply fluoride and conduct oral screenings at well-child visits is there.

This initiative is capitalizing on the opportunity with the goal of **making the application of fluoride varnish at well-child visits the standard of care throughout the county by 2020.**

Champions:

Dr. Salem Magarian, Pediatric Medical Director
Santa Cruz Community Health Centers

Raquel Ramirez Ruiz, Senior Health Services Manager
County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency

Elisa Orona, Executive Director
Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz County

3C. Recruit more mid-level providers and pediatric dentists

With the help of a newly-received Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant, Salud Para La Gente will expand capacity by recruiting more mid-level providers, as well as a pediatric dentist.

Executing this and other initiatives will significantly increase the number of Santa Cruz County residents with access to quality healthcare, thus improving the lives of people not just today, but well into the future.

Salud will grow capacity by increasing efficiency, creating an increase in total dental visits at Salud 20% by 2020.

Champion:

Dr. Randolph Cross, Dental Director, Salud Para La Gente

What are your ideas

These recommendations and goals are a start. But we want your ideas on ways you can influence your world to make dental care more widely accessible to all Santa Cruz County residents.

Whether you are a dentist or not, you can help improve the oral health of our county. You can co-champion a recommendation, share your ideas, or donate.

E-mail your ideas to:
info@oralhealthscc.org

Oral Health Access
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Commissioned by:

dientes
COMMUNITY DENTAL

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