



## Press Release

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### **Oral Health Access Announces Strategic Plan to Address Dental Crisis in Santa Cruz County**

*Thousands in the Low Income Community Will Benefit*

(Aptos, CA) The Oral Health Access Strategic Plan to address Santa Cruz County's dental disease epidemic and oral health access problem was released on Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup> to a packed audience at Seascapes Golf Club. Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County is a 17-member steering committee comprised of healthcare providers, policy makers and community advocates. The committee has been focused on this hidden epidemic for months, using Dientes-commissioned oral health needs assessment to better understand the access problem and determine actionable, measurable plans to address it.

The study, *Increasing Access to Dental Services for Children and Adults on the Central Coast*, outlined a massive need that requires community action. Of the 80,000 people on Medi-Cal in Santa Cruz County, only 25,000 were able to see the dentist. The needs assessment also revealed that, although dental coverage is required to be made available for children under all health plans, 30.8% of children in Santa Cruz County under the age of 11 have never visited a dentist and almost one-quarter of all pre-K children have untreated dental decay. Furthermore, Medicare does not meet seniors' dental needs, and seniors make up the fastest growing demographic in our community.

Oral Health Access Steering Committee co-Chair Dientes Dental Director Dr. Sepi Walthard commented, "I am so proud of the work of this committee. It will have a long-lasting impact on the oral health, and therefore the overall health, of our entire community."

The Oral Health Access strategic plan outlines actions that will have the biggest impact for Santa Cruz County by 2020, all with the tenet of, 'you don't have to be a dentist to make a difference!'

### **First Tooth First Birthday**

The plans include a multi-point education campaign encouraging parents to bring their child to the dentist by his or her first tooth or first birthday by 2020. The goal of this effort is to prevent cavities from even starting and to increase dental utilization rates for children ages 0-3 from 43% to 60%. First 5 Santa Cruz County Executive Director David Brody and Central California Alliance for Health Programs Manager Javier Carrillo will head this portion of the plan.

### **Mandatory Kinder or First Grade Dental Screenings**

Santa Cruz County Office of Education Superintendent of Schools Michael Watkins is behind another key goal of the strategic plan, namely to mandate the currently optional kindergarten or first grade dental screenings by 2020. Reinstating this requirement will help Santa Cruz County maintain its 4-6 year olds' dental utilization at 65%; an important step toward a lifetime of good oral health.

### **Expand Treatment, Prevention and Clinical Capacity**

The third area in the strategic plan is comprised of three components that are under an umbrella of expanding treatment, prevention and clinical capacity by 2020. Dientes Community Dental Care plans to serve an additional 8,000 children, adults and seniors in a new clinic to be built over the next few years. Salud Para La Gente will increase their dental visits by 20% through measures to increase efficiency using mid-level providers including hygienists. And, there is a multi-organizational effort to make the application of fluoride varnish the standard of care at well-child medical visits which will be led by Pediatrician and Pediatric Medical Director at Santa Cruz Community Health Centers, Salem Magarian.

Oral Health Access Steering Committee co-Chair Supervisor Zach Friend commented, "United behind a common goal, we have the ability to dramatically improve the oral health of our most vulnerable Santa Cruz County residents."

Comments and ideas from the public are welcome and can be shared at: <http://oralhealthsc.org/contact>

The Oral Health Summit was sponsored by Kaiser Permanente, Sutter Health Santa Cruz, Dientes, Central California Alliance for Health, Salud Para La Gente, Register-Pajaronion, CHDP and Santa Cruz Sentinel.

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*Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County's mission is to improve the oral health of Santa Cruz County by uniting stakeholders and advocating sound, measurable strategies that increase access to care and education. The 17-member steering committee represents a wide array of local health industry experts, community leaders and education advocates. Facilitation of the committee was shared in partnership between Salud Para La Gente and Dientes Community Dental Care.*