

APTOS — The Oral Health Access Strategic Plan was released on Monday to a packed audience at Seascapes Golf Club.

Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County is a 17-member steering committee comprised of health-care providers, policy makers and community advocates. The committee has been focused on dental disease in the county for months, using Dientes-commissioned oral health needs assessment to better understand the access problem and determine plans to address it.

The study, "Increasing Access to Dental Services for Children and Adults on the Central Coast," outlined the issue. 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 percent 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.

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

The plans include an educational 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 percent to 60 percent. 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.

Superintendent of Schools Michael Watkins is behind another goal of the plan, namely to mandate the currently optional kindergarten or first grade dental screenings by 2020.

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. There is also an effort to make the application of fluoride varnish the standard of care at well-child medical visits which will be led



Contributed

SCCHC Pediatric Director Dr. Salem Magarian speaks with Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County co-Chairs Supervisor Zach Friend and Dientes Dental Director Dr. Sepi Walthard.

by Pediatrician and Pediatric Medical Director at Santa Cruz Community Health Centers, Salem Magarian.

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

Plan unveiled to address dental disease in county

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