ORAL HEALTH ACCESS SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Strategic Plan 2024–2028

EVERYONE DESERVES A HEALTHY SMILE!

Oral Health Access
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Dear Oral Health Advocate,

For the past eight years, Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County (OHA) has been steadily working towards creating a measurable impact on access to dental care. We've already made great strides:

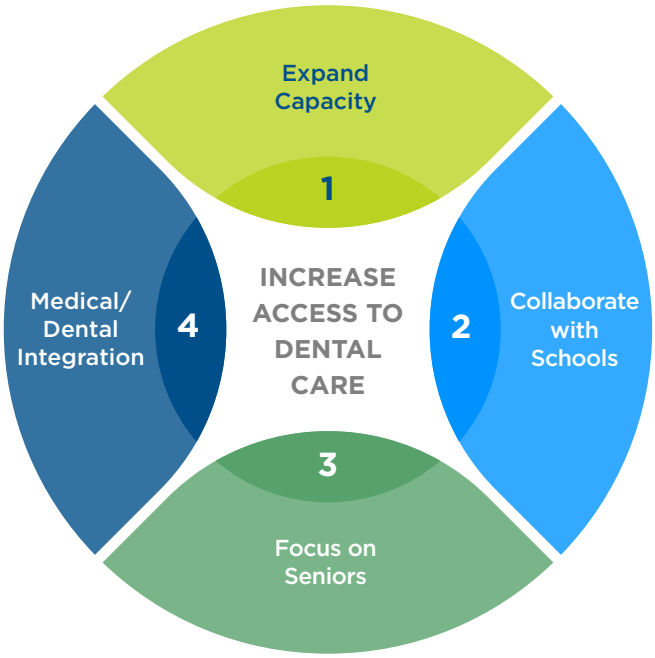
- 3,400 more people with Medi-Cal are going to the dentist
- Clinical capacity has grown by 39%
- There's been a 225% increase for children with Medi-Cal going to the dentist by their first tooth or first birthday.

Our 2024–2028 Strategic Plan is informed by our 2022 oral health needs assessment[1]. It builds on our successes and expands the amazing group of leaders dedicated to making a difference in the oral health of our community.

Because everyone deserves a healthy smile, we have developed a four-pronged approach that includes making more dental appointments available, working with schools, focusing on seniors, and prioritizing special populations through medical/dental integration.

By growing our membership and adding new areas of focus, OHA will continue to increase access to dental care and improve the oral health of Santa Cruz County.

Please join us on our journey to create more healthy smiles!



In health,

Sheree Storm
Chief Strategy Officer
Dientes Community Dental Care

David Brody
Executive Director
First 5 Santa Cruz County

Co-Chairs, Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County

Monica Nicholas
Senior Health Educator
County of Santa Cruz, Public Health

Project Director, Local Oral Health Program

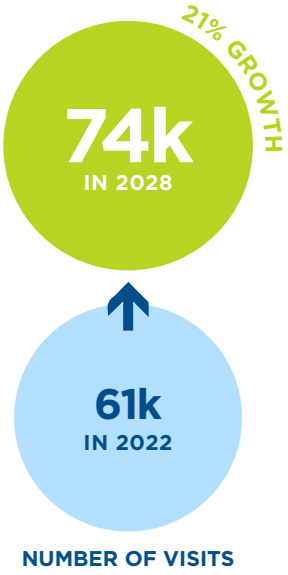
[1] *"The Continuing Need for Oral Health Services," Barbara Aved Associates, April 2022.*

Note: Statistics included refer to individuals who have Medi-Cal Dental as their insurance. Medi-Cal is the state's public health insurance for people who make less than $20,121 for an individual, or less than $41,400 for a family of four.

GOAL 1

Expand Treatment, Prevention, and Clinical Capacity

Despite recent improvements, 55,000 people with Medi-Cal in Santa Cruz County are still not able to go to the dentist because there is not enough clinic capacity. Improving access to appointments—through clinical efficiencies and hiring—underpins our Oral Health Access Strategic Plan.



Goal 1 increases the number of appointments available for underserved populations 21% by 2028. We will achieve this goal by:

- Continuing to ramp up existing clinics and mobile dental programs after pandemic-related reductions
- Hiring dentists, mid-level providers (like hygienists and dental assistants with extended functions), and support staff
- Increasing access to comprehensive dental care for the special populations identified in this plan

CHAMPIONS

Dr. Sepi Taghvaei (Dientes) and Dr. Sung Sohn (Salud Para La Gente)

GOAL 2

Collaborate with Schools

In 2022, children ages 3–5 went to the dentist more frequently than any other age group (61%). This then dropped off to 18% by age 21 and stays low for the rest of their life. Goal 2 leverages the relationships that schools have with families to continue to connect children with a dental home through KOHA and to engage teens to make oral health care a priority.

2A. Kinder Oral Health Assessments (KOHA)

Maintain the rate of children ages 3–9 going to the dentist at 60% through 2028. With a focus on KOHA screenings, we will achieve this goal by:

- Working with schools to grow participation, tracking, and reporting
- Providing education for parents on the importance of oral health and linking families to dental homes

2B. Address Tween/Teen Oral Health

Increase the rate of children ages 10–18 going to the dentist from 53% in 2022 to 60% by 2028. With a focus on adolescents, we will achieve this goal by:

- Engaging local youth in peer-to-peer oral health education campaigns
- Working with schools to integrate oral health education into classrooms
- Providing more dental care onsite at middle and high schools

CHAMPIONS

2A & 2B) Heather Thomsen (Santa Cruz County Office of Education) and Monica Nicholas (County of Santa Cruz, Local Oral Health Program)

2B) Claudia Martin (Salud Para La Gente)

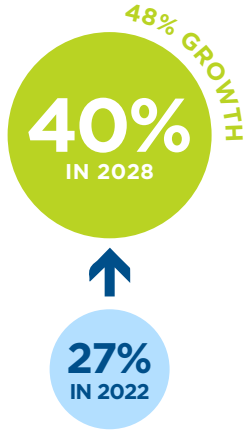
GOAL 3

Increase Oral Health Access and Education for Seniors

Seniors are the largest growing demographic in our community, yet, they experience the lowest rates of going to the dentist, often have the most expensive dental needs, and may experience transportation challenges. Furthermore, the public insurance available to seniors (Medicare), does not include dental coverage as part of its core.

Goal 3 raises the rate of seniors aged 65+ going to the dentist to 40% by 2028. We will achieve this goal by:

- Conducting a survey on senior oral health needs and barriers to care
- Providing mobile dentistry at senior centers, congregate meals sites, and living facilities
- Promoting transportation options to get to dental appointments
- Rolling out an oral health education campaign
- Distributing hygiene kits and oral health tips in food bags
- Engaging in advocacy for dental benefits to be added to Medicare



SENIORS WITH MEDI-CAL GOING TO THE DENTIST

CHAMPION

Laura Marcus (Dientes) and Dr. Sung Sohn (Salud Para La Gente)

GOAL 4

Focus on Medical and Dental Integration

Poor oral health is associated with serious conditions such as poor birth outcomes and diabetes. Leveraging the relationships that primary care providers have with their patients as trusted sources of information, Goal 4 works to improve access to oral health through integration of medical and dental care.

PREGNANT PEOPLE

47% IN 2020 → 60% IN 2028 (28% GROWTH)

4A: Pregnant People

Increase the rate of pregnant people going to the dentist to 60% by 2028. We will achieve this goal by:

- Conducting an education campaign for Medi-Cal members and providers
- Promoting oral health through nurse home visiting programs
- Implementing a robust referral program

1–2 YEAR OLDS

52% IN 2022 → 60% IN 2028 (15% GROWTH)

4B: First Tooth, First Birthday

Increase the rate of children ages 1–2 going to the dentist to 60% by 2028. We will achieve this goal by:

- Continuing the successful First Tooth, First Birthday education campaign for new parents and providers
- Promoting oral health milestone payments to Semillitas college accounts
- Reaching out to medical providers to promote oral health in pediatric settings
- Promoting oral health through home visiting programs

4C: Fluoride Varnish

Increase the number of fluoride varnish applications provided by primary care providers to children ages 0–5 by 20% by 2028. We will achieve this goal through medical provider / training and education.

4D: Diabetic Patients

Because of the close relationship between diabetes and oral health, this goal will increase education and access for those with diabetes by 2028. We will achieve this goal through increased mobile dentistry and an education campaign for patients and providers (including pharmacists).

CHAMPIONS

4A) Prima Hernandez (County of Santa Cruz, Public Health)
4B) David Brody (First 5 Santa Cruz County)
4C) Kristynn Sullivan & Andrea Swan (Central California Alliance for Health), Raquel Ruiz (County of Santa Cruz, Clinics), and Laura Wishart (Health Improvement Partnership)
4D) Heather Lawler (Cabrillo College, Dental Hygiene Program), DeAndre James (Community Health Trust of the Pajaro Valley)

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Central California Alliance for Health
Community Bridges – Puentes de la Comunidad
Community Health Trust of Pajaro Valley
Delta Dental
dientes Community Dental Care
First 5 Santa Cruz County
Grey Bears – connect sustain recycle
HIP Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz County
County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department
Santa Cruz County Public Health
Salud Para La Gente – Working Together for a Healthy Community
Salud y Cariño – Physical Activity · Prevention · Education
Santa Cruz County Office of Education
Santa Cruz Community Health
Santa Cruz County Health Centers
Semillitas
Senior Network Services
Seniors Council – Concilio de Personas Mayores – Service • Support • Advocacy
United Way of Santa Cruz County