



PRESS RELEASE

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FIRST 5 SACRAMENTO JOINS EARLY SMILES® THE CENTER FOR ORAL HEALTH AND THREE DENTAL PLANS TO EXPAND SCHOOL-BASED ORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE IN SACRAMENTO TO DELIVER DENTAL CARE FOR 20,000 CHILDREN

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – In an unprecedented effort to address oral health disparities in the Sacramento region, First 5 Sacramento is joining the partnership established by the Center for Oral Health (COH) and LIBERTY Dental, HealthNet, and Access Dental plans. With First 5's support, the partners will expand their collaborative and innovative School Based Oral Health Program to include younger children. The initiative, known as **Early Smiles Sacramento** has set a goal of **servicing 20,000 children** in Sacramento-area schools, preschools and kindergarten every year.

The need for – and the benefit of – this initiative is tremendous: California children with dental pain miss 874,000 school days annually which costs school districts millions of dollars in school attendance fees.

“Dental disease is the number one reason kids miss school and it disproportionately affects children in low-income communities,” said Dr. Conrado Bárzaga, Executive Director for the Center for Oral Health. “The leadership of First 5 Sacramento and the three Dental Plans that are supporting this initiative is truly commendable. This preventive-care approach has already proven to be an effective program, which has increased access to dental care and established a dental home for thousands of children in Sacramento County.”

COH has partnered with LIBERTY Dental Plan, Health Net and Access Dental to increase access to preventive dental care and navigation services for underserved children in Sacramento, starting with services this summer session. This-School Based Oral Health Program provides checkups and preventive treatments for children that might otherwise not receive these services. The network of dental providers from LIBERTY Dental Plan, Health Net and Access Dental, serves as the dental home for children identified in need of restorative dental care, it offers case management and ensures their members get the dental care they need.

“First 5 Sacramento uses Proposition 10 funding to offer effective early intervention and preventative programming for some of Sacramento County’s most vulnerable children and families,” explained **First District Supervisor Phil Serna, Chair of First 5 Sacramento**. “This innovative partnership with the Center for Oral Health will improve health outcomes for young children by enhancing access to critical services.”