



PRESS RELEASE

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SCHOOL-BASED ORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE IN SACRAMENTO DELIVERS DENTAL CARE TO OVER 82,000 CHILDREN

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – In an unprecedented effort to address oral health disparities in the Sacramento region, the Center for Oral Health (COH), LIBERTY Dental, Health Net, and Access Dental plans developed an innovative preventative School-Based Oral Health Program. The initiative, known as Early Smiles Sacramento, **has served over 82,000 children** in Sacramento-area schools, preschools, and kindergarten since its inception in 2016. The need for – and the benefit of – The Early Smiles Sacramento Program is tremendous: California children with dental pain miss 874,000 school days annually which costs schools \$29 to \$32 million annually in average daily attendance funding. (1)

The Center for Oral Health released a six-year evaluation of the Early Smiles Sacramento Program (2016 to 2022). The report highlights the Early Smiles Sacramento Program, its impact on Sacramento County, its accomplishments, and the dental disease epidemic. [Link to Report](#)

“Despite dental disease being 100% preventable, it continues to be the number one reason kids miss school; it disproportionately affects children in low-income communities,” said Kevin Scott, Chief Executive Officer for the Center for Oral Health. The leadership of the Dental Plans that are supporting this initiative is truly commendable. This preventive-care approach has proven to be an effective program, which has increased access to dental care and a dental home for thousands of children in Sacramento County.

“We know that better health outcomes start – first and foremost – with access to care,” said Medi-Cal and Medicare President at Health Net, Martha Santana-Chin. *“We partner with organizations at the local level, like the Center for Oral Health, to build bridges and expand access to care for the communities we serve. We are proud to support their incredible work and look forward to improving the oral health of even more youth in Sacramento.”*

In an average calendar year, our Early Smiles Sacramento program **educates 45,000 students, screens 27,000 children, and provides 21,000 fluoride varnish applications across 12 school districts, 1 Preschool system, and 2 charter school systems in Sacramento County.**

Early Smiles Sacramento is a unique school-based program that brings much-needed dental care to the most vulnerable children in Sacramento County. Early Smiles Sacramento is one of



the very few school-based oral health programs driven by the quadruple aim—Reducing costs, improving population health, patient experience, and team well-being. Early Smiles Sacramento has helped keep children healthy and ready to learn by minimizing class time disruption, providing evidence-based preventive dental services, and navigating every child to a dental home regardless of insurance coverage.

An element that makes the Early Smiles Sacramento program special, is that it utilizes the Medical Dental Referral and Navigation application (MDRAN) system for referrals. A HIPAA-compliant, web-based tool used to refer Medicaid members to a dental provider and track the referral until a dental visit occurs. Each referral is sent directly to one of the dental managed care plans and navigated to their assigned dental home. This system allows Early Smiles Sacramento to connect every Medicaid patient to a dental home within 48 hours!!

“Early Smiles Sacramento continues to positively impact the lives of at-risk children across Sacramento County. Early Smiles provides greatly needed dental screenings to my communities with the greatest need at schools and events across the county. I’ve been fortunate enough to be able to partner with them on numerous events in my district which included free screenings. For many of these children this was their first dental interaction, so a positive experience was critical. These children left this interaction with an understanding of the importance of dental health. Their positive experience will directly result in healthier children who can thrive in our communities.” Sheriff-Elect Jim Cooper Former California State Assembly member.

Center for Oral Health

The Center for Oral Health is a California non-profit founded in 1985 and remains dedicated to improving oral health, especially of vulnerable populations, through innovation, research, education, and advocacy.

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1. Kumar, J. and Thurmond, T. (2023) *Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment Requirement Update, Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment Requirement - Letters (California Dept of Education)*. Available at: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/el/le/yr23ltr0419.asp#:~:text=Tooth%20decay%20is%20the%20most,in%20average%20daily%20attendance%20funding>. (Accessed: 29 June 2023).