



A public entity funded from Proposition 10 tobacco tax funds

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Southern California First 5 Commissions Address Children's Most Unmet Health Care Need

Riverside, Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties Promote Oral Health Programs

(FEBRUARY 17, 2009) RIVERSIDE, CA — Southern California's First 5 Commissions are tackling the health care needs of poor children one tooth at a time.

An independently produced research report on oral health service delivery, released today, shows that local First 5 commissions have expended some \$21 million and made quality oral health care available to one out of every 11 children age 5 and under in the eight Southern California counties.

Although tooth decay is the most common preventable illness, recent findings from the California Health Interview Survey, show that one in three children between the ages of 1 and 5 years across the Southern California region, did not have access to dental insurance and a third had never visited a dentist. In fact, approximately 40 percent of young children in Riverside County had no history of dental services. This means that an estimated 651,534 out of 1.9 million children in Southern California are at risk for poor oral health.

Because the problem is so critical in Southern California counties, Southern California's First 5 Commissions began a major effort in 2004 to combat tooth decay, the most prevalent unmet health care need among children from low-income families.

"It's a serious problem among Riverside County children," said Harry Freedman, executive director of First 5 Riverside. "If untreated, it can lead to a wide range of problems, including pain, infection and permanent loss of teeth, which can impede a child's ability to succeed in school."

First 5 Riverside funds several agencies to provide insurance, screenings, education and treatment to Riverside County children. In addition, First 5 Riverside AmeriCorps members help raise awareness on the importance of good oral health hygiene among children ages 3-5 through the Building Healthy Smiles program. Educating the community on the importance of oral health in early childhood and delivering pediatric dental care services in a comprehensive way leads to improved outcomes, according to the research report.

The First 5 Southern California Alliance for Learning and Results (SCALAR) study was conducted through Davis Y. Ja Associates along with EMT Associates, Inc. and the Center for Non-Profit Management. See "reports" at www.rccfc.org, for the report and summary.

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First 5 Riverside, the Riverside County Children & Families Commission, is a public entity funded by Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues and established by the County Board of Supervisors in 1999. First 5 Riverside provides funding of early education, health and child care services that help children through age 5 develop a strong foundation for success in school and throughout their lives. For more information about First 5 Riverside programs and other funded services, call 951-248-0014 or Toll Free 800-266-3880 or visit www.rccfc.org.