



Oral Health Access

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Everyone deserves a healthy smile.

Press Release

For Immediate Release

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2024 Oral Health Summit Honors Local Oral Health Heroes and Releases New OHA 2024–2028 Strategic Plan

Santa Cruz County.- For the past eight years, Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County (OHA) has been working together to create a measurable impact on the oral health of community residents. On April 24th, 2024, OHA hosted an Oral Health Summit event for nearly 100 stakeholders to celebrate the oral health improvements made since 2016, showcase the new 2024–2028 Strategic Plan including new focus areas, and present awards to local oral health heroes.

“Great strides have been made in improving the oral health of Santa Cruz County residents,” said Sheree Storm, OHA Co-Chair and Chief Strategy Office for Dientes Community Dental Care. “We have served 3,400 more Medi-Cal patients, dental clinic capacity is up 39%, and there’s been a 225% increase for children with Medi-Cal going to the dentist by their first tooth or first birthday.”

“The progress OHA has made thus far, would not be possible without the dedication of many including those that have gone above and beyond in their passion for expanding access to oral health care, demonstrating an outstanding personal commitment to improving oral health for the underserved,” said David Brody, OHA co-Chair and Executive Director of First 5 Santa Cruz County.

At the event, OHA awarded two community members as Oral Health Heroes in two categories, Dental Professional and Non-Dental Professional.

The 2024 Dental Professional Oral Health Hero Award was given to Dr. Sung H. Sohn, Dental Director at Salud Para La Gente for elevating oral health within the clinical environment so that it is more fully integrated into overall health. In addition, she inspires providers who have many demands on their time with patients to incorporate oral health care into their workflows. The 2024 Non-Dental Professional Award was given to Rachel Sandobal, Dental Program Manager at Salud Para La Gente for expanding access to oral health care and promoting understanding of how central oral health care is to overall health in school systems, in the clinic, and in the community. Both recipients received a signed proclamation being recognized by Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors.

A Rising Star award was presented to Project Smile, a UCSC student-led organization, for distributing oral hygiene kits to those disadvantaged.

The 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, presented at the summit, was built from data gathered from the 2022 Oral Health Needs Assessment which found that 55,000 people with Medi-Cal can't get to the dentist, seniors struggle because there is no dental benefit in Medicare, and dental care often is not integrated with medical care to address whole human health.

With a primary focus on increasing access to dental care under the premise 'you don't need to be a dentist to impact the oral health of the community', the new 2024-2028 strategic plan takes strides to address these issues and is centered around four key areas: expanding capacity; collaborating with schools to promote dental homes with kinders and teens; focusing on senior oral health; and medical and dental health integration for pregnant people, children aged 0-5, and those with diabetes. For more information about OHA, Needs Assessment Reports, and the new Strategic Plan, visit: <https://oralhealthsc.org>

Sponsors for the 2024 Oral Health Summit include: Leading Sponsor Delta Dental as well as Kaiser Permanente, Sutter Health, First 5 Santa Cruz County, Dientes Community Dental Care, Dignity Health, Salud Para La Gente, Santa Cruz Community Health, Health Improvement Partnership, Grey Bears, Santa Cruz County Public Health, and United Way Santa Cruz County.

Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County's mission is to improve the oral health of Santa Cruz County by uniting stakeholders and advocating sound, measurable strategies that increase access to dental care and oral health education.

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