



**Del Norte County**  
**Dept. of Health & Human Services**  
**Public Health Branch**  
**Oral Health Program**  
**Strategic Plan 2020-2022**  
**December 2019**



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# Letter to the Community

Dear Community Members,

This strategic plan defines our vision, values, goals, and strategies to improve the oral health of our community by the year 2020. Del Norte County suffers greatly from the burden of oral disease and from a lack of resources to address this problem. We are, though, a resilient community and it is my hope that as a community working together, we will be able to create solutions unique to our area.

This strategic plan outlines a clear direction for us to follow and will strengthen the collective impact of participating organizations to improve services for our community, raise awareness of the overall effects of dental disease, and be the catalyst for integration of oral health into all aspects of our lives.

The goals of the local Oral Health Program are to:

**Increase equal and sustainable access and utilization of dental services.**

**Increase knowledge base of best oral health practices, using appropriate methods for our community.**

**Integrate oral health into overall health.**

We want to sincerely thank our Advisory Committee who generously gave their time and talent to develop this plan and our community partners, without which we would have no services for our community.

Let's work together so that our entire community can thrive!

**Melody Cannon-Cutts**  
**Public Health Program Manager**

## Executive Summary

Oral health is paramount to the overall health and wellbeing of a person. Most oral diseases and dental caries are preventable through habitual oral hygiene and regular visits to a dental provider. Oral health impacts physical health and poor oral health have a major effect on the development of chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer. Apart from physical health, oral health is essential

The Del Norte County Local Oral Health Program (LOHP) was established in February of 2018 with funds allocated by Proposition 56, the California Healthcare, Research, and Prevention Tobacco Tax of 2016. The main goal of the LOHP was to address the burden of oral disease and promote oral health in Del Norte County.

Del Norte County is a small, rural county at the topmost part of California. Surrounded by the ocean and National and State Parks filled with redwoods, the county is one of the most picturesque and rugged counties in California.

The total population estimate for Del Norte County is about 28,530. Children ages 0-5 make up 5.6% of the total population and adults ages 65 and over make up approximately 18% of the population. 78.4% of the population identify as white, 20% identify as Hispanic/Latino, 9.3% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 3.5% Black or African American, 3.1% Asian, and 0.2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Approximately 61.5% of children ages 0-18 live in poverty (0-200% FPL) and 45.4% of women ages 18-64 live in poverty. 92% of the population has health care coverage—33% through employee plans, 32% through Medi-Cal, 12% through Medicare, 13% through non-group plans, and 2% through military or veteran plans.



# Advisory Committee

The LOHP facilitated the formation of an Advisory Committee and the first meeting was held on February 1, 2018. The Advisory Committee continues to meet monthly and new members are recruited and welcomed. Current active members have been invaluable to guiding the LOHP through its first year and through its planning stages.

Active members of the Advisory Committee include participants from Women Infants Children (WIC), Early Head Start and Head Start, Open Door Del Norte Community Health Center, United Indian Health Services (UIHS), Sutter Health, Del Norte Unified School District, First 5 Del Norte, Cal-Fresh Healthy Living, Tobacco Use Prevention Program (TUPP), Maternal Child Adolescent Health (MCAH) Program, Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) Program, Del Norte Child Care Council, local private dental providers, and community members.



## Mission

To build a community environment that values and supports oral health as a necessary component of wellness

## Vision

Healthy smiles **SHINE** in Del Norte!

# Guiding Principles

1

Oral health is integral to **whole person wellness**.

2

Community **collaboration and communication** are important for achieving sustainable environmental change.

3

Everyone has a right to **easy, early, and routine** access to oral healthcare.

4

Everyone has the right to reach their **potential and optimal health** status.

5

Systems should support all sides of oral health—for **patients and providers**.

6

**Evidence-based and evidence-informed** decision making and latest medical research are the basis of our strategies and approaches.

7

Everyone has a right to educational information about oral health in **the way they will best understand it**.

# Our Community Needs

In October of 2019, Del Norte County contracted Resource Development Agency (RDA) to conduct a Community Health Assessment (CHA), which included a needs assessment portion for the LOHP. While this assessment depended upon state and regional data, the LOHP and LOHP Advisory Committee decided that primary data, collected from members of the community would be beneficial in helping the program understand local oral health needs and gaps.

## Needs Assessment Planning

Advisory Committee members engaged in an initial process to identify community oral health needs and determine goals and resources. From this process, the group also identified data that the LOHP would need to collect in order to devise strategies to address local oral health needs.



## Needs Assessment

The LOHP partnered with Del Norte County Public Health in assessing the community health needs. In order to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities around oral health, a mixed methods approach was used to collect qualitative data and quantitative data. Del Norte County Public Health and LOHP engaged the community in a



variety of different ways—community meetings, focus groups, surveys, key informant interviews and comment boards.

The data collection activities utilized in this process were designed to engage the community in welcoming and low-barrier activities to allow for as much input as possible through multiple mediums. Working with RDA, this primary data was compiled and, along with state and regional data, was analyzed.

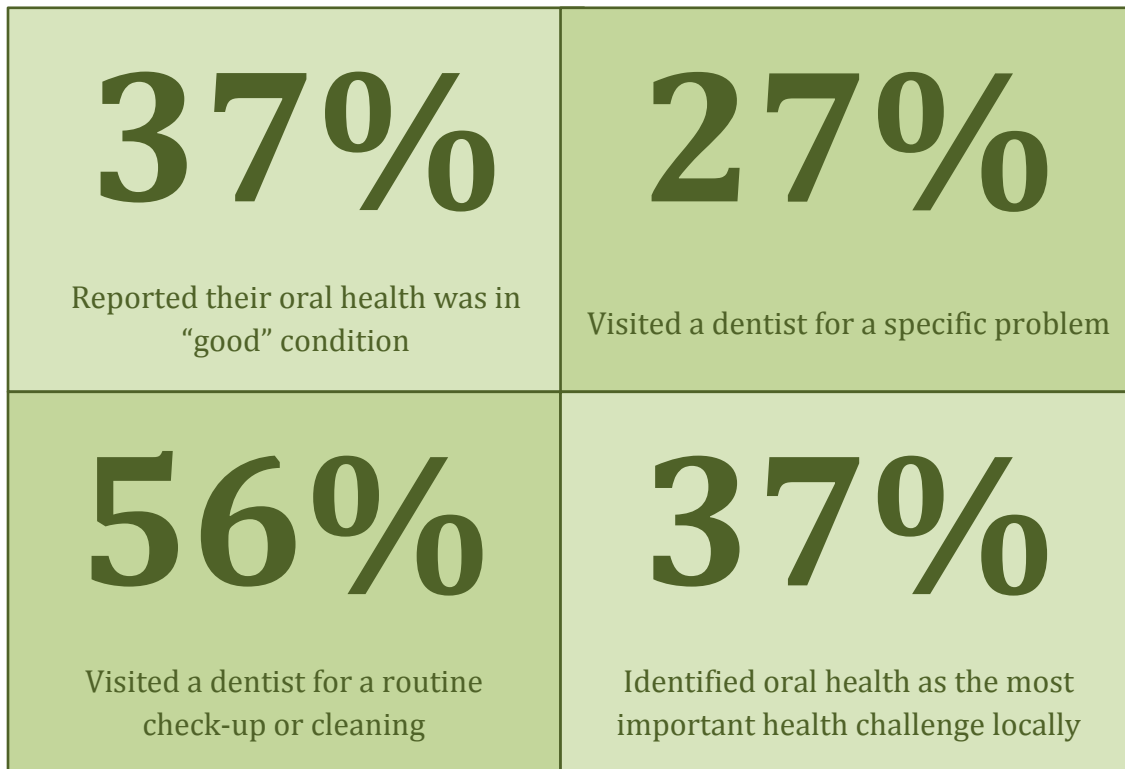


## **Needs Assessment Findings**

Through the needs assessment process, many issues were discovered related to oral health care and RDA and the LOHP conducted a feedback session with the Advisory Committee to gather input regarding the data that was collected and the findings that came out of the needs assessment. The key findings include the following:

## Oral health is the most important health challenge in Del Norte County.

Among survey respondents, the following was reported:



## Crescent City stopped community water fluoridations in 2012 after a voter initiative.

Community water fluoridation is one of the most effective ways to deliver the right amount of fluoride to all community members. Despite this, a moratorium on water fluoridation passed with 56% of the vote in 2012 until chemical manufacturers are able to provide toxicological reports to the public.

## There are not enough dental providers to care for our community.

“ The clinic is so impacted; you could sit there for several days and not be seen.

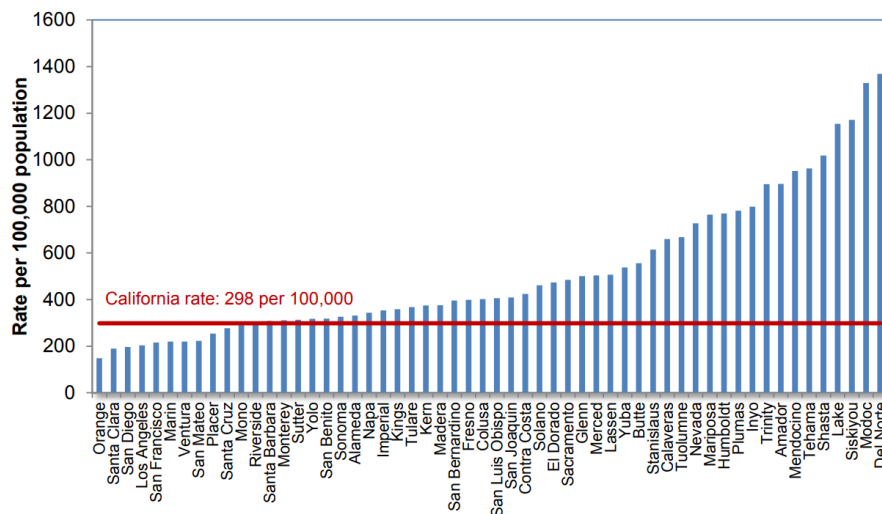
Del Norte Community Health Center is the only provider that accepts Medi-Cal Dental for all residents, though UIHS also accepts Medi-Cal Dental for tribal members and their households. It can take an average of **four to six months** for a resident in Del Norte County to receive dental services. Provider shortages have resulted in long wait times, traveling out of the area for routine dental care, paying out of pocket to access care sooner, or not accessing care when being turned away.

## Del Norte County has the highest rate of Emergency Room visits for preventable dental conditions in California.

Negative, and often traumatic, experiences accessing dental care and the associated shame that comes with having poor dental hygiene has caused the community to wait until they are in pain before seeking out oral healthcare.

Del Norte County has **the highest rate** of preventable dental emergency department visits in all of California, far exceeding the state rate, with the highest rates being among those 18-34 years old.

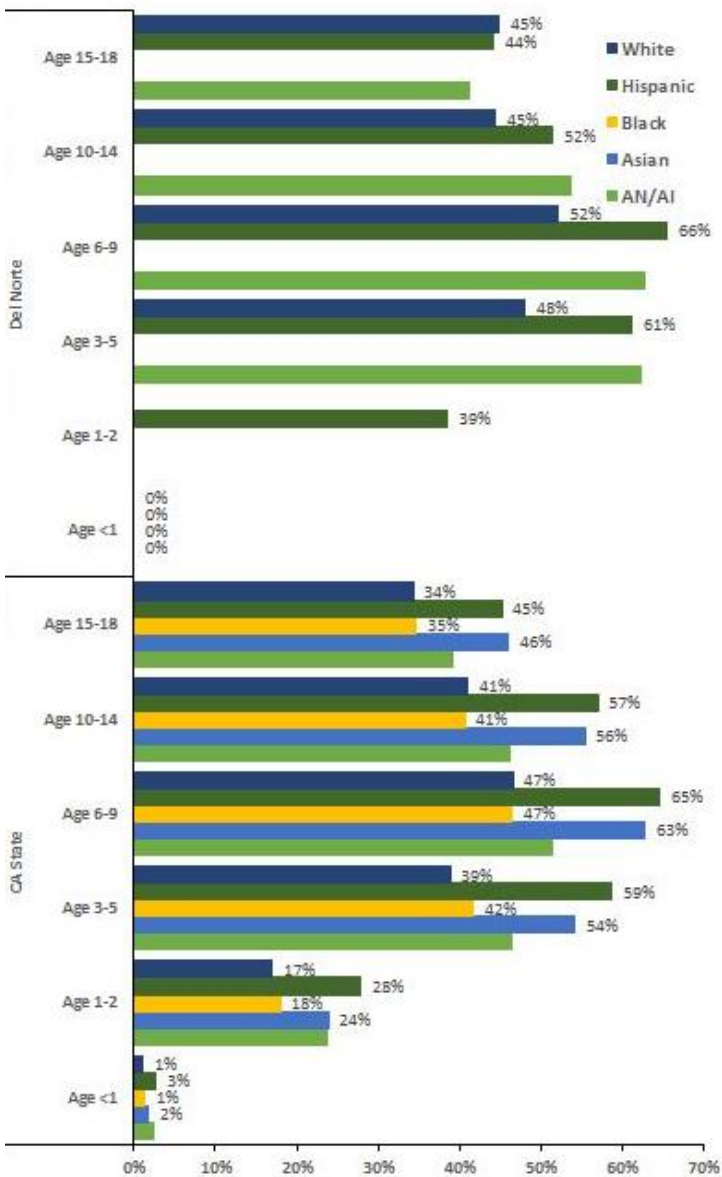
Figure 21. Age-Adjusted Rates of Preventable Dental Emergency Department Visits per 100,000 in California by County, 2012



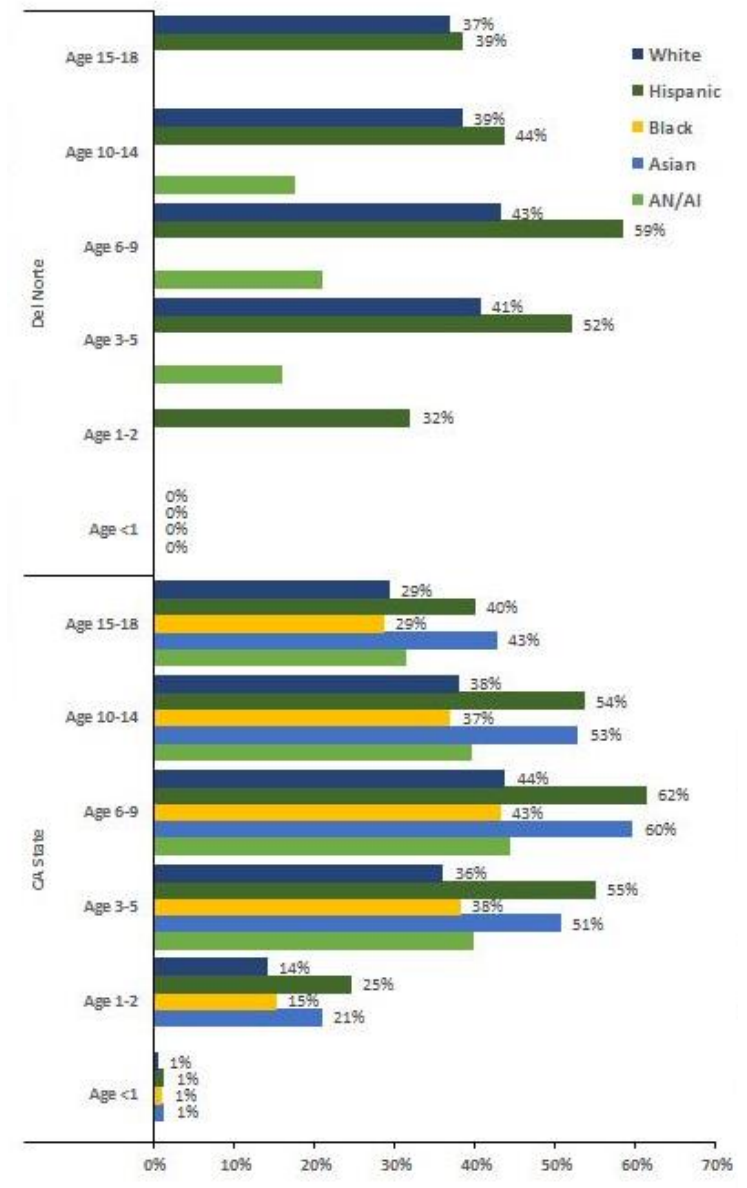
# Accessing and using preventative dental care services is low—especially with persons who have a low-income.

Medi-Cal utilization data shows that Del Norte County falls short of state rates for annual dental visits and preventative dental visits for most ages and ethnic groups:

**Annual Dental Visits (ADV)**



**Preventive Dental Visits (PDV)**



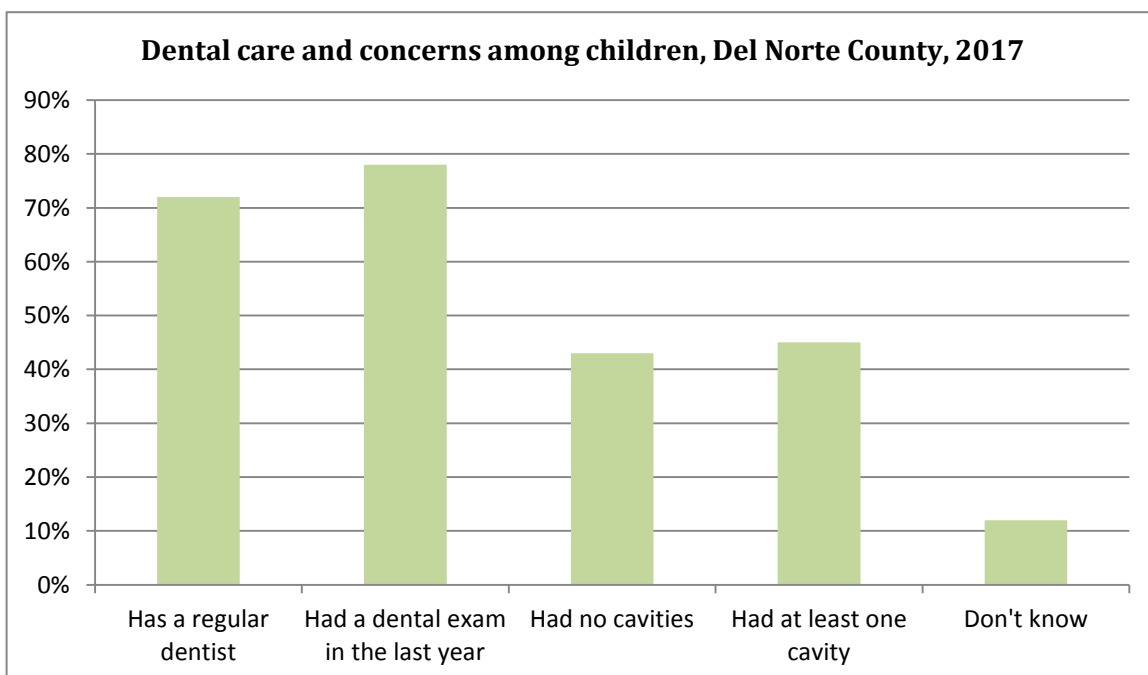
Nearly one quarter of the population of Del Norte County lives below the poverty level, with the highest rates among children, ethnic communities, and individuals without a high school education.

Persons living in poverty are **two times less likely** to have their teeth cleaned professionally in the last year.

## A large amount of children entering kindergarten have cavities, even though they had a dental exam in the last year.

Despite being preventable, early childhood caries are common in Del Norte County. For children entering kindergarten who responded to the First 5 School Readiness Assessment, **nearly half** (45%) of them had at least one cavity. Positively, almost 80% of children entering into kindergarten had a dental exam in the last year. However, only 72% of respondents had a dental home.

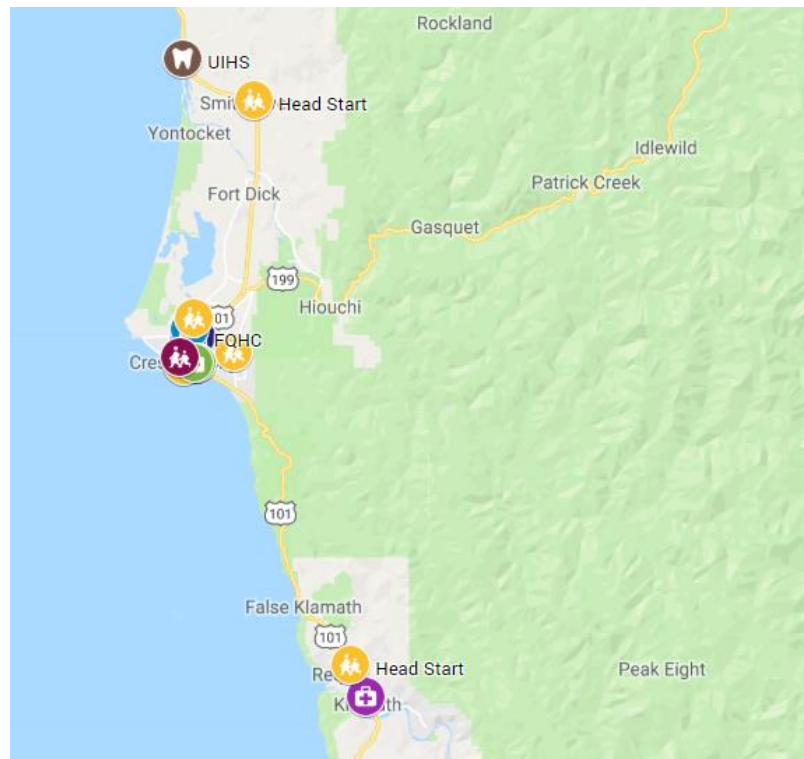
Among children for whom the most recent dental exam was known, most (20%) received care from Del Norte Community Health Center. However, the data reflect that the largest group of children either receive dental care from an unknown provider or do not receive oral healthcare at all.



## The majority of dental resources are centered in Crescent City, with little to no resources in the frontier communities.

The Local Oral Health Program Advisory Committee conducted an assessment of the dental health resources in Del Norte County. These resources were put into one of three categories: Access, Education and Awareness, and Integration. The Access group included dentists, community health centers and Indian Health Services that had dental services incorporated, and other dental providers. The Education and Awareness category included community organizations, head start, and preschool sites that have incorporated oral health education into their programs or curriculums. The Integration category included organizations or programs that incorporated some sort of oral health care into their services, such as teeth brushing routines or fluoridation application.

According to the resource map, many of the resources and services are centered in the Crescent City area, with little to no services or resources available in the frontier communities. United Indian Health Services provides dental services from their Smith River site, but only to the tribal community and their households.



For residents living in the outlying communities, such as Gasquet and Klamath, accessing dental care is quite difficult, and many individuals seek care outside of Del Norte County.

Interactive Resource Map: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=12dk0iZcPBAT6GAnWuRefgbXuPmmTbmFr&usp=sharing>

# Goals & Strategies

## 1. ACCESS: Increase equal and sustainable access and utilization of dental services.

**1.1 By June 2022, increase the rate of utilization of preventative dental services for children and adults by 5%.**

**Baseline:** Latest utilization rates for annual dental visits for Medi-Cal recipients are highest among 6-9 year old children, followed by children ages 3-5 years old. Utilization rates are the lowest among the oldest and youngest Medi-Cal beneficiaries, especially ages 1-2 years old. Utilization rates for preventative dental visits follow a similar pattern.

- The LOHP will collaborate with local private practice dentists and dental clinics to facilitate recruitment and retention of new dental providers to practice in Del Norte.
- The LOHP will support at least one local dental professional to complete Registered Dental Hygienist (RDH) training or Registered Dental Hygienist Alternative Practice (RDHAP) training.
- The LOHP will purchase portable dental equipment and make the equipment available to providers to utilize to provide services and mitigate access issues, especially in frontier communities.
- The LOHP will collaborate with dental providers, including teledentistry, to offer screening and preventative services to the community.
- The LOHP will assist in Medi-Cal Dental efforts to encourage private practice dentists to enroll as Medi-Cal Dental providers.
- The LOHP will assist families and residents in accessing dental services, addressing barriers such as transportation, scheduling, etc.

## 2. EDUCATION & AWARENESS: Increase knowledge base of best oral health practices, using appropriate methods for our community.

**2.1 By June 2022, oral health resources and education on the importance of oral health and the relationship to overall health will be implemented in at least ten (10) new programs or locations.**

- The LOHP will provide education to community regarding the recommended age of a first dental visit.
- The LOHP will develop a community media campaign that is linguistically and culturally inclusive of all demographics living and working in Del Norte County.
- The LOHP will collaborate with community partners to provide up-to-date information about best practices for oral health.
- The LOHP will develop or purchase an oral health curriculum for local home visiting programs, pre-schools, child care providers, Head Starts, and Early Head Starts.
- The LOHP will promote medical-dental integration by facilitating access to continuing education opportunities for medical and dental providers.
- The LOHP will collaborate with CalFresh Healthy Living to provide community education about sugar-sweetened beverages and increased risk for oral disease and other chronic disease.
- The LOHP will collaborate with the Tobacco Use Prevention Program (TUPP) and Tobacco Free Del Norte to provide community education on the risks associated with the use of tobacco products and the increase in oral disease and chronic disease.





### **3. INTEGRATION: Integrate oral health into overall health.**

**3.1 By June 2022, the rate of ED visits for preventable dental conditions is reduced by 15%.**

**Baseline:** Del Norte has, by far, the highest rate of non-traumatic dental conditions (NTDC) related emergency department visits in California at 1815 per 100,000 (2012-2016), which is 5 times greater than the state rate.

- The LOHP will collaborate with Sutter Coast Hospital to identify the most common dental conditions upon admission.
- The LOHP will collaborate with medical and dental providers to provide education on the relationship between tobacco use and oral disease.
- The LOHP will collaborate with medical and dental providers to provide education on Medi-Cal Dental benefits, healthy oral hygiene practices, and the appropriate use of emergency departments.

**3.2 By June 2022, reduce the rate of children entering kindergarten who have had at least one cavity by 5%.**

**Baseline:** According to the First 5 School Readiness Assessment in 2017, **45%** (almost half) of children had at least one cavity.

- The LOHP will facilitate access to curriculum and dental supplies for zero-to-five-focused programs who will integrate an oral health component.
- The LOHP will facilitate access to education/training for primary care providers (PCPs) and medical staff on fluoride varnish application and caries risk assessment.
- The LOHP will facilitate access to education/training for PCPs and medical staff on the importance of prescribing fluoride supplementation for children living in non-fluoridated communities.
- The LOHP will encourage primary care providers and zero-to-five-focused programs to recommend the first dental visit at first tooth.
- The LOHP will collaborate with medical and dental providers to provide education regarding sugar-sweetened beverages and dental caries risk.



**3.3 By June 2021, establish reporting of Kindergarten Oral Health Assessments (KOHAs) returned to the school district to the System for California Oral Health Reporting (SCOHR).**

**Baseline:** Currently, KOHAs are not being entered into the SCOHR.

- Develop and implement a KOHA handbook for Del Norte Unified School District, Unchartered Shores Academy, and Del Norte Office of Education.
- Collaborate with DNUSD school nurse staff to educate school staff and parents on the importance of KOHA completion.
- The LOHP will facilitate access to a dental home for children requiring an oral health assessment.
- The LOHP will collaborate with dental providers, including teledentistry, to offer screenings to children entering kindergarten.

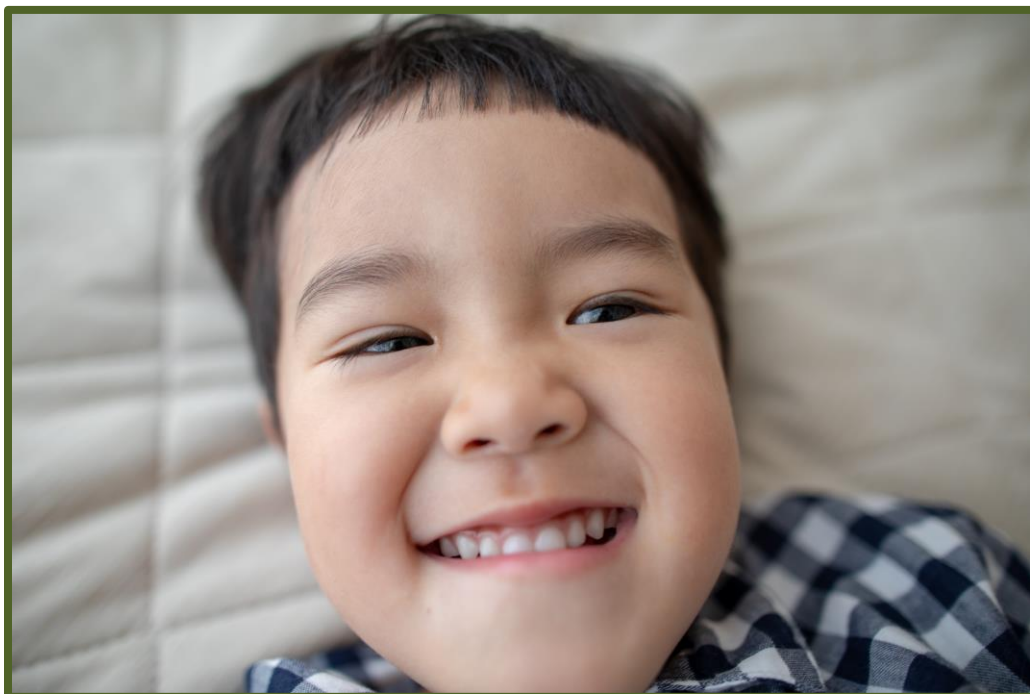
## Summary & Next Steps

While the needs assessment process did identify local resources and programs, it also highlighted the many gaps and opportunities for improvement. These gaps and challenges are not new or unrecognized by our community. In compiling and analyzing the increasingly compelling data for Del Norte County, these issues became stark and immediate.

To help fill these gaps and eliminate barriers, the LOHP will focus on improving access to dental care, increasing education and awareness about oral hygiene and best practices, and encouraging integration of oral health into primary care and community programs.

Primary data, collected locally, was of paramount importance to the Advisory Committee in establishing trust with our community. The LOHP will continue to collect data from the community in the form of surveys and interviews to measure changes in local perception of oral health and oral health access.

The LOHP will also continue to maintain and develop community partnerships to ensure the oral health of the community improves. LOHP Advisory Committee will continue to meet and direct the implementation of the LOHP Strategic Plan and participate in the evaluation of the program.



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