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Groundbreaking Children’s Dental Study Identifies Lack of Dental Services and Access for Low Income Children

Sacramento, CA— The most common and preventable disease of childhood is tooth decay, but access to dental services for many children remains challenging for parents and caregivers. The problem is even greater among low income, uninsured, and minority children whose access to services is limited. The First 5 Sacramento Commission released a groundbreaking Study that examines the dire dental needs of children in Sacramento County. The Study titled “Sacramento Children Deserve Better” takes a deep look at access, utilization and quality of dental care under the current Geographic Managed Care (GMC) dental insurance offered through Medi-Cal.

Key Findings

- Only 20% of eligible children in Sacramento County used a dental service in 2008, compared to over 40% statewide.
- Children often use hospital emergency rooms as a way of getting care for oral conditions considered preventable.
- Not all dental plans comply with the “first tooth/first birthday” recommendation for the initial dental visit.
- Sacramento’s GMC dental insurance is difficult to navigate and did not save money in 2008.

Recommendations

The Study recommended several steps to improve the availability of dental services for children and the utilization of those services. Those that are likely to be most impactful include:

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- Initially, identify an oversight group to work with the California Department of Health Care Services to enhance accountability of GMC;
- Ultimately, pursue legislation or regulatory changes to make GMC voluntary in Sacramento County;
- Recruit more dentists to take children with Medi-Cal, including pediatric specialists;
- Enhance prevention efforts aimed at low-income families; and
- Expand school-based screening programs and the availability of community dental clinics.

The Study and Executive Summary are available at www.First5Sacramento.net under the *Special Features* section.

About First 5 Sacramento

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child's growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents tax on tobacco products to support programs for expectant parents and children ages zero to five. First 5 Sacramento County distributes approximately \$16 million a year in Prop 10 revenues to programs and services that meet local needs. Information about the First 5 Sacramento Commission is available online at www.First5Sacramento.net or by calling 916-876-5865.

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