First 5 Santa Cruz County



Annual Evaluation Report

July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First 5 Santa Cruz County's Strategic Framework

When Proposition 10 passed in 1998, California made a definitive and enduring commitment to promote the health and well-being of young children (prenatal through age five) and their families. Since then, First 5 Santa Cruz County has had the great privilege and responsibility to serve as the steward of Prop 10 revenue, ensuring these public funds benefit all young children and their families in Santa Cruz County, particularly those who are excluded from opportunity based on income, language, immigration status, race or ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other social identities.

First 5 is dedicated to giving children ages 0-5 the opportunities they need to be healthy, able to learn, emotionally well developed, and ultimately reach their full potential. Since its inception, First 5 Santa Cruz County has invested in many innovative, effective programs and initiatives to achieve these goals.

First 5 Santa Cruz County's Vision of Success

Healthy, happy, and well-prepared children. Thriving Families. Connected communities. Equitable systems.

First 5 Santa Cruz County's Mission

To ensure early childhood systems and supports foster equitable health, development, and well-being for all young children and their families in Santa Cruz County.

2025 – 2030 Strategic Plan

To continue realizing this vision, First 5 Santa Cruz County has prepared the next Strategic Plan for the years 2025–2030. This plan—developed in collaboration with staff, Commissioners, agency partners, and community leaders—reflects First 5's continued commitment to focus efforts and investments on four Strategic Goals: Healthy Children; Thriving Families; Early Care and Education; and Equitable and Sustainable Early Childhood Systems.

This plan builds on First 5's extensive history of innovation, effective partnerships, and demonstrated impacts. It also recognizes the tremendous challenges and uncertainty that many families and organizations in the community are facing, including First 5. Over the next five years, First 5 will use this strategic plan to guide decisions, navigate challenges, and explore new opportunities and approaches to fulfill their mission.

This annual report summarizes findings of the First 5 Santa Cruz County evaluation from **July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026**, which is the first year of the 2025–2030 strategic plan. Many programs are multi-year investments, and therefore some information presented reflects multiple years of data.

Figure 1: **Strategic Goals established by the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan**



Healthy Children

- Equity in Strong Start Scores across the county
- Increased access to affordable quality health care
- Increased use of preventive and early intervention services
- Improved perinatal, infant, and child health



Thriving Families

- Increased resilience of young children and their families
- Improved parenting practices and parent-child relationships
- Increased "social capital" (relationships and connections) of young children and their families
- Decreased child abuse and neglect



Early Care and Education

- Increased access to affordable, high-quality, inclusive early care and education (ECE) for children ages 0-5
- Increased alignment and cohesion within and between the ECE system and TK-12 education system
- Increased stability and sustainability of the ECE system, including the workforce
- Increased early learning and school readiness skills (developmental, social-emotional, language, literacy, numeracy)



Equitable and Sustainable Early Childhood Systems

- Increased parent/community voice in early childhood advocacy and systems change initiatives
- Increased coordination and integration among organizations and sectors serving young children and families
- Policies and funding that prioritize prevention, early intervention, and equity for young children and their families

Summary

The following is an Executive Summary of this *2025-26 Annual Evaluation Report*, providing a review of key County indicators of child and family well-being, a description of the population served by First 5-funded programs, and highlights of the activities and achievements in each of the four goal areas of the 2025–2030 First 5 Santa Cruz County Strategic Plan.

Overall Well-Being of Children in the County

First 5 Santa Cruz County invests in efforts that support its vision of Healthy, Happy, and Well-Prepared Children, Thriving Families, Connected Communities, and Equitable Systems. To help guide its investments and partnerships, First 5 monitors county-wide trends that affect child well-being. The fiscal year 2025-26 marks the first year of the 2025–2030 strategic plan, and the following data reflect the status of young children and their families in the County (the most recent data available are reported).

A profile of Santa Cruz County's youngest children

- **Santa Cruz County has a diverse population of young children which is decreasing in number.** In 2026, there were 12,773 children ages 0-5 in Santa Cruz County, continuing a deceasing trend since a high of 19,591 in 2012. The majority of these children were either Hispanic or Latine[1] (48%) or White (44%). This diversity is also evident in kindergarten, where in 2026 almost 32% of children had a primary language other than English.

Healthy Children

Medical Care

- **Children have health insurance.** In 2024 (using 5-year averages), the vast majority of County children ages 0-5 had health insurance (98%). First 5 Santa Cruz County continues to provide assistance to families to enroll in public health insurance programs, to help every child aged 0-5 get insured.

- **The percentage of young children getting dental care is increasing.** In 2023, there were 6,202 County children ages 1-5 who had been enrolled in dental-eligible Medi-Cal coverage for at least three consecutive months. Although the number of children meeting this enrollment threshold has been trending down over the past five years, a growing share of them are **utilizing** their coverage to get annual dental care. Data indicate that the percentage of County children enrolled in Medi-Cal who had been to a dentist in the last year has been increasing. In 2023, 56% of children ages 1-2 saw a dentist in the last year, which is an increase of almost 9 percentage points over the previous five years. Approximately 64% of children ages 3-5 saw a dentist in 2023, with a smaller but steady increase over the previous five years.

[1] "Latine" is a gender-neutral term used when referring to people of Latin American heritage without assuming their gender identity. See *Hispanic Executive* for more information about the use of this term (http://hispanicexecutive.com/latinx-latine-explainer/).

- **Children have access to a provider for routine preventive care.** In 2025, in Santa Cruz County, 80% of infants with Medi-Cal insurance (ages 0-15 months) had received at least six Well-Child check-ups within the first 15 months of life, following an increasing trend over the previous five years. Of toddlers with Medi-Cal insurance (ages 15-30 months), approximately 87% had received at least two Well-Child visits.

- **Children are receiving early intervention services**

  - **Infants are receiving their recommended vaccinations**: Original recommendations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) state that children should complete the series of "Combination 10" immunizations by the age of two.[2] These "Combination 10" immunizations help protect children against ten serious and preventable diseases. In 2025, almost 45% of County children ages 0-24 months covered by Medi-Cal insurance received all 10 recommended vaccines by their second birthday. This percentage has been slowly decreasing over the previous five years.

  - **Children are receiving developmental screenings.** Developmental screenings early in a child's life help identify potential developmental delays and ensure timely intervention. In 2025, County children age 0-36 months covered by Medi-Cal insurance received developmental screenings appropriate to their age: 46% of children aged 12 months, 67% of children aged 24 months, and 54% of children aged 36 months.

  - **Children are getting vision screenings.** The American Optometric Association (AOA) recommends that children should have their first comprehensive eye exam between 6 to 12 months of age, then at least once between 3 and 5 years of age, once again before they start school, and annually thereafter.[3] In 2025, almost 20% of County children ages 0–5 covered by Medi-Cal insurance received a vision screening at least once during the year. This percentage has been staying relatively level over the previous five years.

- **Fewer children are using the emergency department (ED).** Ideally, children and their families who have insurance and who have a medical home will be more likely to access their provider for routine preventive care, and will be less likely to use the emergency department (ED) for non-urgent medical care.

  - Although the number of County infants under age 1 who have visited an ED has increased over the past 5 years (2020-2025), it is important to remember that in 2020 there was a dramatic decrease in ED visits, which may have been due to parents choosing not to use the hospital ED during the COVID-19 pandemic for low risk, non-specific symptoms. The increase in ED visits since 2020 suggests that these numbers are returning to pre-pandemic values.

[2] California Quality Collaborative, *Childhood Immunization Status – Combo 10 (CIS)*, 2025. Retrieved from https://www.calquality.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Quality-Measure-Resource-Guide-Childhood-Immunization-Status-CIS.pdf on 10/2/26.

[3] American Optometric Association, *Comprehensive eye exams*, [Retrieved 8/17/26 from https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/caring-for-your-eyes/eye-exams], 2019.

- The services provided by the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program may have had an effect on the use of the ED for very young infants, and particularly those who were covered by Medi-Cal. Since the launch of this program at Watsonville Community Hospital in 2009, the number of infants (under age 1) on Medi-Cal who visited the Emergency Department dropped 55% by 2025.

- **Maternal mental health.** The percentage of mothers experiencing perinatal depression is slowly rising. In 2022, 15% of mothers in Santa Cruz County reported that they had experienced prenatal depression symptoms, an increase from 13% in 2021. There was also an increase in the percentage of mothers who reported postpartum depression symptoms, from 13% in 2021 to 17% in 2022 (the most recent year of data available).

BIRTHS AND PRENATAL CARE

- **Newborns are born with resources that promote resilience.** The "California Strong Start Index" uses information collected at birth to understand the conditions under which California's babies are born. The California Strong Start Index is comprised of 12 indicators, and the "Strong Start score" is calculated by simply counting the number of these assets present at birth (0-12). These assets are tied to good outcomes and resilience throughout a person's lifespan. In 2023, babies born in Santa Cruz County had an average Strong Start score of 9.6 assets (out of 12), compared to 9.0 assets statewide. This Strong Start score has not varied much over the years.

- **The number of mothers receiving prenatal care in the first trimester is increasing.** Data regarding early prenatal care in 2024 show some improvements over the previous five years in Santa Cruz County.
  - In 2024, 88% of all mothers received prenatal care in their first trimester, which exceeds the Healthy People 2030[4] target rate of 80.5% for a related objective (*"Increase the proportion of pregnant women who receive early and adequate prenatal care").*
  - Among younger mothers (ages 24 and younger), a slightly lower percentage received first trimester care (83%), but with trends showing an increasing percentage receiving this early prenatal care over the previous five years.
  - Additionally, there were differences in receipt of early prenatal care based upon the mother's source of payment for the care. In 2024, 95% of mothers with private insurance began receiving prenatal care during the first trimester, compared to 80% of mothers with Medi-Cal insurance.

[4] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Healthy People 2030 portal, *Increase the proportion of pregnant women who receive early and adequate prenatal care — MICH-08*, 2026.

- **The percentage of preterm births and babies with low birthweights is staying relatively level.** In 2024, 7.4% of all mothers in the County had preterm births, which has stayed relatively level over the previous five years. The same year, 5.5% of all mothers had babies with low birthweights, showing little change over the previous five years.

- **The percentage of births to teen mothers in the County is staying low.** In 2024, the percentage of births to teen mothers represented 3.0% of all births in Santa Cruz County, and there was a teen birth rate of 5.3 per 1,000 (ages 15-19). Both of these measures have decreased slightly over the previous five years.

- **Over half of the births in the County were paid for by Medi-Cal.** Of the mothers who gave birth at one of the three Santa Cruz County hospitals in 2026, 55% of the births were paid for by Medi-Cal. This percentage has slightly decreased over the previous five years.

Thriving Families

FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

- **Unemployment varies greatly across the County.** In 2026, the average unemployment rate in the County was 6.0%, similar to the previous year. Within the County, the percent of unemployed residents differs greatly by area; the average unemployment rate ranges from 2.6% in Corralitos to 12.0% in Boulder Creek.

- **Many families are living in poverty.** The U.S. Census Bureau reported that in 2024, almost 12% of the general population of Santa Cruz County—and 5% of families with children under age 5—earned below the Federal Poverty Level. However, the "Real Cost Measure" (RCM) published by the United Ways of California suggests that the actual percentage of County residents in poverty is likely to be much higher. In 2023, the RCM estimated that in Santa Cruz County, for a family of four (with 2 adults, 1 infant, and 1 preschooler), 37% of these families lived in poverty.

- **Household incomes are not high enough to meet basic needs for many families.** For Santa Cruz County, the RCM estimated that in 2023 the median household income for a family of four (with 2 adults, 1 infant, and 1 preschooler) was **$119,488**. This median income is lower than the minimum income needed to meet basic needs, as estimated by the RCM (**$142,068**). The Self-Sufficiency Standard for California is considered an even more comprehensive measure of income adequacy. In 2026, the Self-Sufficiency Standard for California calculated an even higher minimum income (**$297,700**) for a family of four (with 2 adults, 1 infant, and 1 preschooler).

> *"Poverty can impede children's ability to learn and contribute to social, emotional, and behavioral problems. Poverty also can contribute to poor health and mental health.*
>
> *Risks are greatest for children who experience poverty when they are young and/or experience deep and persistent poverty.*
>
> *Research is clear that poverty is the single greatest threat to children's well-being."*
>
> **- National Center for Children in Poverty <http://www.nccp.org>**

ENROLLMENT IN PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

- **Medi-Cal enrollment is trending lower.** In 2026, the number of all Santa Cruz County residents enrolled in Medi-Cal was 83,252, which is slightly lower than the enrollment numbers in 2025. Among the population of newborns born to County residents in 2026 (whether they were born in a County hospital or other location, or outside of the County), 1,329 newborns were enrolled in Medi-Cal, which is also a bit lower than enrollment numbers in 2025.

- **There is varying enrollment in public assistance programs.** In Santa Cruz County, enrollment in CalWORKs and CalFresh has grown between 2021-2026. Similarly, the enrollment in the Women, Infants, & Children program has increased slightly between 2020-2025. Whereas the number of students receiving Free and Reduced Price Meals had been decreasing since 2021, it has leveled off in 2026.

- **Residents are receiving housing assistance.** In 2025, 6,488 households were living in subsidized HUD housing units. This includes units provided by every HUD housing program present in Santa Cruz County: Housing Choice Voucher (HCV), Mod Rehab, Project-Based Section 8, Section 202/PRAC (supportive housing for the elderly), and Section 811/PRAC (supportive housing for persons with disabilities). The number of occupied HUD housing program units has been increasing over the previous five years.

CHILD WELFARE / FAMILY SUPPORT

- **Foster care "Point-in-Time" in-care rates are staying relatively level.** The foster care "Point-in-Time" in-care rates in Santa Cruz County are presented here for three different age groups of children.[5] In 2023, the foster care "Point-in-Time" in-care rates were highest for infants under age 1 (**6.3** per 1,000), compared to the 2026 foster care rates for toddlers ages 1-2 (**3.3** per 1,000) and the 2025 foster care rates for preschoolers ages 3-5 (**1.8** per 1,000). The rates for each age group have stayed roughly the same over the previous five years.

- **There are decreasing rates of child maltreatment.** Although the rates of child maltreatment in Santa Cruz County have been fluctuating in recent years, the overall rates of maltreatment have been steadily decreasing over the past two decades.
    - Between 2007-2025, rates of **allegations** of abuse and neglect for children ages 0-2 have shown a steady decrease. For children ages 3-5, allegation rates have also been decreasing since 2007, but have been slowly increasing between 2020-2025. Between 2011 and 2013, Santa Cruz County moved from being above (or at) the statewide rates, to below them (and have generally stayed below since).
    - Similarly, rates of **substantiated allegations** of child maltreatment have also been steadily decreasing over the past two decades (2005-2025). In 2010, the rates of

[5] The data for foster care "Point-in-Time" in-care rates may not be available for certain years due to the need to "mask" statistically low numbers in order to protect the confidentiality of individuals served.

substantiated allegations in Santa Cruz County moved from being substantially above (or at) the statewide rates, to below them (and have stayed below since).

- However, data are revealing that infants still have substantially higher rates of abuse than toddlers and preschoolers. In 2025, the rate of substantiated allegations of child maltreatment was highest for infants under age 1 (**10.8** per 1,000), compared to the 2024 rate of substantiated allegations for children ages 1-2 (**3.3** per 1,000), and the 2025 rate for children ages 3-5 (**3.2** per 1,000).[6]

- **Many adults report having experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).** The extreme stress and adversities that children experience can have lifelong impacts on health, well-being, and economic opportunities. Results from the 2024 *California Health Interview Survey* showed that in Santa Cruz County, approximately 45% of adults reported having experienced two or more adverse experiences as a child.

- **Children are experiencing the bonding practice of shared reading**. Family Reading measures a type of Positive Childhood Experience (PCE), which is a focus of the Thriving Families Strategic Goal. While Family Reading contributes to children's school readiness, it also cultivates positive parenting practices that strengthen parent-child relationships, which in turn foster resilience and help children thrive. The American Academy of Pediatrics discusses many of the benefits of families reading together with their young children, stating that "shared reading, a positive parenting practice, helps build the foundation for healthy social-emotional, cognitive, language, and literacy development."[7]

  Results from the 2024 *California Health Interview Survey* show that in Santa Cruz County, almost 73% of family members are reading to their children ages 0-5 at least every day, and this percentage has been increasing over the previous six years.

Early Care and Education

EDUCATION

- **Fewer child care spaces are available.** In 2023, there were 5,918 child care spaces available in Santa Cruz County for children ages 0-5, a decrease from approximately 7,000 in 2016. This supply is not sufficient to handle the demand. In 2023, child care spaces were available for only 26% of infants/toddlers (age 0-2), and for 78% of preschool children (ages 3-5). Similarly, in 2023 child care was available for only 41% of children ages 0-12 with parents in the labor force.

[6] Data for some years are not available due to the Data De-identification Guidelines (DDG) adopted by California Department of Social Services, which require that statistically low values be masked on all public-facing resources in order to protect the confidentiality of individuals served by CDSS and the counties.

[7] American Academy of Pediatrics, Early Literacy, *Literacy Promotion*, retrieved from https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/early-childhood/early-childhood-health-and-development/early-literacy/ on 9/23/26.

- **Not all income-eligible children are enrolled in subsidized child care.** In Santa Cruz County, in 2023 only 15% of income-eligible infants and toddlers ages 0-2 were enrolled in subsidized child care. A higher percentage of income-eligible preschool children ages 3-4 were enrolled (59%), and has been increasing over the previous five years.

- **Young children with developmental challenges are getting support.** In 2026, 7% of children ages 3-5 in Santa Cruz County were receiving special education services, demonstrating the importance of having services available to support the needs of these young children with developmental delays.

- **Children with disabilities are getting enrolled in inclusive Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings.** The Santa Cruz County Office of Education describes the importance of providing special education services to students with disabilities, "Since its passage in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has transformed the educational landscape by ensuring that children with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), grounded in the principles of equity, access, and inclusion." Results provided by the California Department of Education (CDE) report that almost 88% of County children with disabilities ages 3-5 were enrolled in ECE settings that met these LRE requirements.

- **ECE settings are implementing inclusive practices for children with disabilities**: A recent grant that the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (COE) received from the CDE, titled *Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program (IEEEP)*, has provided funding for ECE staff and settings in the County to increase their knowledge and skills to provide inclusive early care and education programs to children with disabilities and exceptional needs, through practice-based coaching and job-embedded professional learning.

  As explained on the CDE's website, "the goal of the IEEEP grant is to increase access for young children birth to five years old in inclusive early care and education programs. It supports the inclusion of children with disabilities and exceptional needs, including children with severe disabilities, in early care and education settings pursuant to Part B and Part C of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act."

  The types of CDE-recommended professional development trainings used by the COE include: "Behavior and the use of positive behavior supports," the "Pyramid Model implemented with practice-based coaching," use of the "Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) with a focus on inclusion," and use of the "Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP)," among others. Through these professional development trainings, ECE staff will develop the knowledge and skills required to implement effective inclusive practices in early child care setting for children with disabilities.

  The COE submits Progress Reports to the CDE throughout the grant period, and January – June 2026 is the most current report submitted. At the time of this June 2026 report, results show that 21 classrooms and 63 staff were participating in these grant-funded trainings, and

that almost 67% of staff have completed all trainings. Only the data from this most recent Progress Report are reported here. As there is ongoing fluctuation of sites and staff during this grant period, no comparisons between Progress Reports would be appropriate.

- **Third graders are struggling with their reading skills.** One of the most powerful indicators of later success is a child's reading proficiency at the end of 3rd grade.
  - In 2025, only 37% of all Santa Cruz County 3rd grade students met or exceeded standards in English language arts/literacy, and there were significant disparities by students' English-language fluency, race/ethnicity, and economic status.
  - When English language learners in 3rd grade were evaluated with an assessment specifically designed to measure English language proficiency (the *English Language Proficiency Assessments for California*), results showed that 5% of Santa Cruz County 3rd grade English Learner students were assessed as having "well-developed" English skills, and another 26% were assessed as having "moderately-developed" English skills.

A Profile of First 5 Participants

First 5 reaches children who can make great gains with early and smart investments

First 5's goal is to serve children ages 0-5 and their families who have the most challenges in Santa Cruz County, including English language learners, and families with fewer resources.

- **First 5-supported programs are wide-reaching.** In 2025-26, First 5 and its partners served **5,743** unique children ages 0-5, representing 45% of all children these ages in Santa Cruz County. **An *additional* 5,831 *services*** were provided to children who participated in programs where no client ID was available to track their participation, or who were indirectly supported by a First 5-funded program.
- **First 5 serves a high number of dual language learners.** Of the children served by First 5, 72% were Hispanic or Latine, and approximately 58% of children lived in households that primarily spoke a language other than English (Spanish, bilingual Spanish/English, a Mesoamerican language, or another non-English language). Of all Hispanic or Latine children ages 0-5 in Santa Cruz County, it's estimated that at least 61% participated in services funded by First 5.
- **First 5 is serving children in the highest risk zones of the County.** The "California Strong Start Index" uses information collected at birth to understand the conditions under which California's babies are born at a very local level, and measures resources that are tied to good outcomes and resilience throughout a person's lifespan, such as healthy birth weight, timely prenatal care, parental education level, and parents' ability to afford and access health care. Of the children served by First 5 in 2025-26 who had known ZIP codes, the vast majority (81%) lived in the areas of the County with the fewest Strong Start assets (the Live Oak area of Santa Cruz, the city of Santa Cruz, and Watsonville), showing that First 5 partners are reaching children and families who typically experience the greatest barriers to good health and well-being.

First 5 strengthens systems by enhancing the capacity of service providers

In addition to supporting direct services to children and families, First 5 aims to boost the capacity of local systems in order to extend the reach of critical early education, family support, and health services to a larger number of children and families. Systems enhancements help ensure better services for years to come.

Examples of First 5's capacity-building work in 2025-26 include:

- **Skill development and coaching for early childhood educators.** In 2025-26, **410** early childhood educators received professional development training from funded programs.
    - This includes **50** early childhood educators from state and federally-subsidized preschools, licensed private and non-profit child care centers, public Transitional Kindergarten classrooms, and licensed family child care homes, who took a SEEDS of Learning™ course; **7** SEEDS Quality Coaches who provided literacy coaching to early educators receiving SEEDS of Learning™ instruction during the year; and providers who participated in Quality Counts Santa Cruz County, including **267** teachers in child care center sites, **103** providers in family child care sites, and **40** license-exempt Family, Friend, and Neighbor providers.

  Some educators participated in more than one funded program and are duplicated in these breakdowns.

- **Development of a population-based system of parent education.** In 2025-26, **6** new parent education practitioners received training to deliver the Triple P –Positive Parenting Program, an evidence-based curriculum shown to improve parental efficacy, parent-child interaction, and child behaviors.

Healthy Children

For the past several years, First 5 Santa Cruz County has invested in strategies to help ensure that all children have health insurance and access to care.

- **Santa Cruz County's newborns are getting connected to medical care.** During 2025-26, the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program provided essentially all mothers with a newborn visit while in the hospital (or via phone), and 99% of these mothers received a First 5 California *Kit for New Parents*. Of all mothers with births paid by Medi-Cal, effectively all were assisted to complete a Medi-Cal Newborn Referral application for their new baby, and 100% of these mothers identified a preferred primary care provider (PCP) or clinic for their child before discharge from the hospital.

- **Children are receiving routine preventive care.** Central California Alliance for Health (the Alliance) discusses the importance of infants getting all of their well-child visits during the first several months of their life, in order to be able to assess their growth and development.

Results provided by the Alliance show that in 2025, approximately 80% of all infants with Medi-Cal insurance in Santa Cruz County had received at least six well-child visits with a provider within the first 15 months of life. This success was likely assisted by the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program's efforts to connect all newborns with a primary care provider.

Uninsured children are:

- *Over 13 times more likely to lack a usual source of care;*
- *Nearly 5 times more likely to have delayed or unmet medical needs;*
- *Over 3 times more likely to have unmet mental health service needs;*
- *5 times more likely to have unmet dental and vision care needs;*
- *Nearly 4 times more likely to have an unmet need for prescription drugs.*

- Children Now <http://www.childrennow.org>

- **Newborns are getting connected with County programs.** Newborn Enrollment Coordinators (NECs) incorporate multiple services into their newborn visits. In addition to the Medi-Cal enrollment assistance and review of the contents of the *Kit for New Parents*, NECs also introduce mothers to several County programs that are available.
  - The **State-wide Student Identification number (SSID)** is created for newborns by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education and is used to support the social, emotional, and academic development of children from birth through 12th grade.
  - The Ventures[8] **Semillitas college savings account program** for newborns creates a savings account for college or vocational education after high school for every child born in Santa Cruz County. With county partners like Dientes, Salud Para La Gente, Triple P, and the Central California Alliance for Health, the program also incentivizes healthy behaviors by making additional payments into these savings accounts for accomplishing important health milestones (such as a baby going to the dentist by the emergence of their first tooth or their first birthday, receiving baby immunizations and wellness checks, etc.).
  - **Dolly Parton's Imagination Library** helps children develop a love for reading by providing free books to children from birth to their fifth birthday. Families in Santa Cruz County can now enroll their children from birth to age five in this program, and every month a new, high-quality, and age-appropriate book will be mailed to their child.
- **Newborns and their families have access to food.** The Newborn Enrollment Coordinators (NECs) also provide families at hospitals with resources to apply for the CalFresh program and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program.
- **Children are getting their vision screened.** The American Optometric Association recommends that children should have their first comprehensive eye exam between 6 to 12 months of age, then at least once between 3 and 5 years of age, once more before they start school, and then annually. To help identify vision problems early in life, the First 5 VisionFirst program was developed in Santa Cruz County as a way to provide children as young as 6 months old with a simple instrument-based vision screening right in their child care setting.

[8] Ventures was formerly known as Santa Cruz Community Ventures.

First 5 VisionFirst Outreach staff were trained to use the Spot Vision Screener, a handheld portable device designed to quickly and easily detect vision issues. The Spot Vision Screener does not replace a complete eye examination by an optometrist. Rather, it only identifies a potential vision issue. Parents of children who are found to be "out of range" (showing a potential vision problem) are encouraged and assisted in following up with a full vision exam from an optometrist. At this appointment, the optometrist can determine if the child requires glasses, needs to be monitored, or requires regular eye exam follow-up care.

Results from FY 2025-26 show that of the 582 children who received this vision screening, 87 (15%) were found to have a possible vision issue, and 75 of these children went on to get a full vision exam with an optometrist. Ultimately, 58 children were prescribed eyeglasses. These children now have the opportunity to use their vision to help guide their learning experiences throughout their lives.

- **Children in the foster system are getting screened for developmental concerns.** The Neurodevelopmental Foster Care Clinic (NDFCC) is an innovative, coordinated approach to address the neurodevelopmental needs of children age 0-5 in the foster care system. Their interdisciplinary team focuses on early intervention to address the needs of young children who have recently entered foster care, and to provide comprehensive services to these foster children, their birth families, and foster families. During the time that this program has been receiving funding from First 5 (2011-2026) approximately 1,089 children ages 0-5 in foster care have been evaluated and assisted with counseling and referrals to medical and developmental services.

  In FY 2025-26, First 5 notified the NDFCC that due to budget constraints, First 5 would need to suspend financial support beginning July 1, 2026. To assist them with the transition, First 5 has been working with a core planning team to find a near-term solution to the financial challenges faced by the NDFCC. In June, 2026 it was confirmed that the Central California Alliance for Health would enter into a contract with Stanford Children's Health to authorize and reimburse for children referred to the NDFCC.

Thriving Families

One indicator of child safety are the County measurements of child abuse and neglect. Fortunately, the rates of child maltreatment are decreasing.

Rates of **allegations** of abuse and neglect in Santa Cruz County show a steady decrease since 2007 for children ages 0-2. For children ages 3-5, rates have also shown a steady decrease since 2007, but have been slowly increasing over the previous five years. Between 2011 and 2013, Santa Cruz County moved from being above (or at) the statewide rates, to below them (and have generally stayed below since). Similarly, rates of **substantiated allegations** of child maltreatment have also been steadily decreasing. In 2010, the rates of substantiated allegations in Santa Cruz County moved from being substantially above (or at) the statewide rates, to below them (and have stayed below since).

These improvements have likely been assisted by the efforts of the county-wide Triple P and Families Together programs, which launched in late 2009 and 2006, respectively.

First 5 Santa Cruz County helps strengthen parent-child relationships and reduce risk for child abuse and neglect

Through innovative programs, First 5 and its partners are helping to decrease the risk and incidence of child abuse and neglect.

- First 5 continued to implement and scale up the Positive Parenting Program, or **Triple P**. The program consists of five levels of intervention, from broad-based, universal efforts in the community to more intensive, focused efforts with individual parents. The Triple P model is an evidence-based program shown in numerous randomized studies to increase parental confidence and efficacy, promote positive parent-child interactions and child behaviors, and reduce rates of child maltreatment.

  Highlights of Triple P include:

  - **Evidence-based parenting support is available.** First 5 has implemented all five levels of Triple P in Santa Cruz County, ranging from a media campaign to intensive and focused individual services. Between 2010-2026, approximately 19,700 parents with almost 38,200 children have participated in the program.

  - **Parents are engaged and seeking more opportunities.** Over the past several years, analyses have consistently shown that brief services are an effective way of getting parents initially engaged in the program, and gives them an opportunity to participate in further services. Parents who attend Seminars and Workshops frequently request follow-up services, and parents who participate in one or two brief consultations for specific parenting concerns often return later for in-depth consultations and multi-session programs.

  - **Parenting skills and knowledge are improving along several domains.** Parents who completed assessments that measured their levels of parenting skills and knowledge along several domains showed substantial improvements in all domains, including:

    - Improvements in child behavior and emotional regulation
    - Increased use of positive parenting styles
    - Improvements in parental emotional well-being and family relationships
    - Increased parental confidence
    - Support for parents of children aged 6-14 experiencing anxiety
    - Support for expectant parents or parents with infants
    - Reduced levels of conflict between divorced or separated parents
    - Improved anger management

- **Parents with more serious parenting issues are making the greatest improvements.** There was also evidence that parents who began the program experiencing more serious parenting issues demonstrated the greatest improvements as a result of receiving in-depth services.

- **Parents are satisfied with services**. Parents have rated the quality of services very high, noting that the program helped them deal more effectively with their child's behavior, and with problems in their family.

- **Parents are continuing to use the skills they learned.** On average, parents who participated in the Seminars and Workshops felt that they would continue to use the strategies they learned, and parents who received more in-depth training felt that the program helped them develop skills that could be applied to other family members.

- First 5 supports a program called **Families Together**, that provides prevention-based services to Santa Cruz County families experiencing hardships, such as involvement with Family and Children's Services (FCS), financial instability, and other adverse experiences. Families Together accepts referrals from FCS, CalWORKs, and the community. Engagement in Families Together services are completely voluntary, and families have access to services and resources that cover many domains of wellness, including emotional, social, financial, relational, and physical safety. The home visiting program includes comprehensive intake and risk assessments, development of a tailored case plan, parent support and education, child development activities, and periodic assessments. By assisting these families, Families Together can intervene early, before family difficulties escalate to the point of maltreatment, neglect, or other adverse childhood experiences.

  Results of the program have been very encouraging:

  - **Reduction of risk.** Parents/primary caregivers receiving services from Families Together had their levels of risk assessed while they were in the program. Cumulative assessment results from 2007-2026 show that 74% of families were assessed as being "high risk" or "very high risk" upon program intake, but this dropped to just 16% of families who stayed in the program a full year.

  - **Reduced rates of child maltreatment.** Results from 2025 show that 100% of families who received services from the Families Together program *did not have* a substantiated allegation of maltreatment in the six months after their cases closed.

Early Care and Education

First 5 is helping to improve the quality of early learning programs in Santa Cruz County

Santa Cruz County is one of 58 counties participating in Quality Counts California (QCC), a statewide initiative to strengthen California's early learning and care system to support young children and their families. QCC emphasizes an equity approach, prioritizing communities where early investment can make the highest impact, promoting environments, relationships, interactions, and activities that support children's development for success in school and life.

In 2012, First 5 Santa Cruz County launched a local Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), partnering with family child care and child care center providers to improve the quality of early learning for children ages birth through 5 in Santa Cruz County. Funded by California's Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge federal grant, and First 5 California's Child Signature Program, this initiative led to the creation of the Quality Early Learning Initiative Consortium, now known as Quality Counts Santa Cruz County (QCSCC). This Consortium—co-led with the Santa Cruz County Office of Education—worked to develop and pilot a local QRIS, aligning with the California Quality Continuum Framework, as a way to foster ongoing quality improvement that is proven to help children thrive.

Since 2015, a statewide QRIS has been established in all 58 counties. Renamed Quality Counts California (QCC) in FY 2017-18, QCC helps to ensure that children ages 0 to 5—particularly those who are low-income, English learners, or children with disabilities or developmental delays—have access to high quality early learning programs so that they thrive in their early learning settings and succeed in kindergarten and beyond.

> *"A QRIS helps improve the quality of participating programs so they are better prepared to help all children grow socially, emotionally, and physically in a healthy environment, with knowledgeable and caring providers who engage children in a range of enriching activities."*
>
> **- Quality Counts California <https://qualitycountsca.net>**

Beginning in FY 2023-24, QCC shifted some funding away from formal rating to maximize resources and meet the diverse needs of early learning and care providers through research, evaluation, and a focus on equity. QCC continues to maintain some funding for state-subsidized preschool programs to conduct ratings, inform prioritization of quality improvement activities, and increase public accountability.

- **Quality Counts California** – is the state's **Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)**, designed to help improve early care and education programs by measuring current quality levels against research-based standards. In California, these standards focus on what research shows are the key components of quality early care and education, including learning environments, teacher-child ratios, adult-child interactions, staff qualifications, as well as other related criteria. A QRIS can assist early learning educators with increased training to expand their skills in working with young children; provide coaching to help programs create learning environments that nurture the emotional, social, language, and cognitive development of every child; and provide families with information to help them understand and choose quality programs.

- **Quality Counts Santa Cruz County (QCSCC) - Local Quality Rating and Improvement System.** The QCSCC Consortium adopted the Quality Counts California Quality Continuum Framework (QCF)—formerly called the Rating Matrix—as the foundation of their local QRIS. The QCF provides a framework, or structure, for quality improvement and is part of the QCC Implementation Guide (QCC Guide) which provides guidance to support implementation at the local level. As the early education system has evolved, the QCC Guide has been updated to support implementation of the Quality Continuum Framework-Measurable Quality Elements. This Framework includes continuous quality improvement elements for all early learning and care setting types across California, including rating requirements for **California State Preschool Program (CSPP)** QRIS Block Grantees. (Beginning in FY 2023-24, only CSPP programs are required to be rated.)

  In December 2024, all 21 CSPP sites participating in QCSCC were rated using the QCF, and received a rating based on their cumulative scores in all six elements across five tiers of quality, with points assigned to each element. The ratings are valid for 3-5 years (5 years for sites rated at Tiers 4 or 5, and 3 years for sites rated at Tier 3 or below). Sites were rated on a 5-tier scale (1=lowest tier; 5=highest tier). All CSPP sites achieved a rating of either Tier 4 (Exceeding Quality) or Tier 5 (Excellence in Quality).

  In FY 2025-26, there are currently 19 CSPP rated sites which may also have infant and toddler classrooms, as well as an additional 10 private non-profit Center sites and 60 Family Child Care provider sites participating in QCSCC at the Quality Improvement level. The program for license-exempt child care providers, called Family, Friend, and Neighbor care, had 40 participants.

QCSCC overall participation, by Site type (2025-26)

Site Type	Number of Sites	Number of Providers / ECE Professionals	Number of Children Served (ages 0-5)
Participating Child Care Centers	29	267	1,076
Participating Family Child Care (FCC) Sites	60	103	553
Participating Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Sites	40	40	68
Total	**129**	**410**	**1,697**

- **Quality Counts Santa Cruz County Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Workshops.** Beginning in FY 2024-25, QCSCC added a Family, Friend, and Neighbor program. It is estimated that up to 40% of families rely on FFN care at some point during the week or month. These are typically relatives, neighbors, or friends who take care of young children, often in hours that aren't provided at licensed centers. To help ensure the quality and safety of these spaces, First 5 began conducting workshops based on the Quality Continuum Framework, in partnership with three elementary schools in South County.

- **Quality Improvement Activities.** During this past year, Quality Counts Santa Cruz County (QCSCC) has provided online and in-person technical assistance to program directors, teachers and providers; maintained the QCSCC database; and collaborated with partners to provide system-wide trainings.

  In addition, First 5 contracted with Go Kids, Inc. to continue leading the QCSCC Consortium's quality improvement activities for family child care (FCC) programs. The Go Kids Quality Improvement Coordinator supported all 60 FCC providers in updating their annual Quality Improvement Plans, and applying for Quality Improvement grants to enhance their home learning environment. In addition, the Coordinator managed a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for 20 of the participating providers.

- **Quality Counts California Regional Training, Technical Assistance and Coordination Hub – Region 4.** Santa Cruz County is part of Region 4 Hub with neighboring counties (Santa Clara, San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, San Mateo, San Benito, and Monterey). Funded by First 5 California, the Hub counties strategize together, share resources, leverage funds, align early learning practices, and minimize duplication.

First 5 Santa Cruz County builds early literacy foundations by training early childhood educators to enhance language-rich practices in the classroom

One of the most powerful indicators of later success is a child's reading proficiency at the end of 3rd grade. Unfortunately, data show that Santa Cruz County children are struggling with their reading and writing skills. First 5 Santa Cruz County is working to improve these long-term trends by training early childhood educators to use evidence-based early literacy strategies and integrate pre-literacy materials into their learning environments, and by encouraging families to read together.

Having trained 761 early learning professionals to date, First 5 will be shifting its focus in FY 2026-27. Rather than offering county-wide professional development workshops for early childhood education teachers, it will deepen the SEEDS model by placing a Master Literacy Coach directly into early learning and state preschool sites that serve children who qualify for subsidized child care. The Master Literacy Coach will work with whole teaching teams to integrate research-based language and literacy strategies, targeting the Big 5 Early Literacy Skills, into everyday classroom practice.

761 early childhood educators, family child care providers, and Reading Corps literacy tutors throughout the county have been trained to promote strong language and literacy foundations for children.

- **The SEEDS of Learning™ framework is being used throughout Santa Cruz County child care programs.** Since the founding of the Early Literacy Foundations Initiative in 2006-07, **761** unique educators have been trained in the SEEDS of Learning™ framework. This includes 288 educators in state- and federally-subsidized classrooms, 25 educators in public school transitional kindergarten classrooms, 365 educators in licensed family child care homes and private/non-profit centers, and 83 Santa Cruz Reading Corps Literacy Tutors.

- **SEEDS-trained early educators are transforming their classrooms into literacy-rich environments.** SEEDS-trained early childhood educators are working to ensure their children are on target for kindergarten readiness by using evidence-based early literacy strategies, and integrating pre-literacy materials into their learning environments.

  - **Center-Based Toddler and Pre-K Classrooms.**

    Research on teacher effectiveness shows that by focusing professional development on language and literacy and social/emotional development, children are much better prepared for school and have higher academic achievement. SEEDS training is designed to help educators create a literacy-rich environment that supports children's early language, social-emotional development, motor skill development, and emerging literacy and math skills through meaningful, developmentally appropriate experiences.

    In FY 2025-26, the focus of the SEEDS training began including young toddlers up to age 3. To address this younger age group, two instructors of First 5's Early Literacy Foundation program created their own observational checklist called the *Checklist for a Literacy Rich Toddler Program* (*Checklist*). The *Checklist* lists various "literacy-rich strategies" for observers to look for inside a classroom, and these observations are used as a coaching tool, supporting teachers in setting early literacy goals.

    The observers assessed whether or not "literacy-rich strategies" were observed in SEEDS classrooms. Observations were completed at the beginning (Pre) and end (Post) of the SEEDS trainings. Results for this one year show that:

    - On average, literacy-rich strategies were frequently used in classrooms, even before the SEEDS trainings began.
    - By the end of the SEEDS trainings, early childhood educators tended to use even more of these literacy-rich strategies in their classrooms.

  - **Family child care settings.**

    Early childhood educators from licensed family child care settings also participated in SEEDS training and received SEEDS coaching. Their sites were observed at the beginning of their SEEDS training in July and again at the end of their training in September.

    In FY 2025-26, a new set of individual questions from the *CHELLO* were selected to assess the settings at the beginning and end of the training.

    Results for this one year show that:

    - On average, all components that were selected to assess the settings of home-based classrooms showed improvements from the beginning of the trainings to the end.
    - The component that demonstrated the most improvement was the "Literacy Environment Checklist."

> *"The seeds of literacy are planted before children enter school.*
>
> *Important literacy skills do not develop spontaneously, instruction shapes them."*
>
> **- Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998**

- **Parents are getting involved in their children's reading.** SEEDS classrooms and family child care homes also implemented Raising A Reader (RAR), a weekly rotating book bag program for families, to boost shared reading practices and impact children's early literacy skills. In the 2025-26 fiscal year, nearly 3,200 children and their families participated in the program throughout the county, and nearly 35,600 children have participated since the beginning of this program in 2006.

  In FY 2025-26, First 5 notified RAR that due to budget constraints, First 5 would need to suspend financial support beginning July 1, 2026. In fall of 2025, Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) and First 5 met to discuss a sustainability and transition plan for FY 2026-27 that will help districts, agencies, and sites become independent affiliates of Raising A Reader National, which will allow them to independently continue providing Raising A Reader to the community.

- **Children have their own books to develop their love for reading.** Dolly Parton's Imagination Library helps children develop a love for reading by providing free books to children from birth to their fifth birthday, regardless of their family's income. Children have the option of receiving books in English, or bilingual books (English and Spanish). In the fall of 2025, First 5 Santa Cruz County—along with founding local sponsors United Way of Santa Cruz County and Thrive by 5—brought Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to Santa Cruz County. Families can now enroll their children from birth to age five in this program, and every month a new, high-quality, and age-appropriate book will be mailed and addressed to their child.

  Enrollment data from the program's first year (fall 2025 through June 30, 2026) show strong participation among children: 2,598 children were registered in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Santa Cruz County, and 12,405 books were mailed to these children.

Equitable and sustainable early childhood systems

First 5 continues to focus on increasing coordination and integration among County organizations and sectors serving young children and families, prioritizing efforts that are responsive to the needs of the County's diverse community, and increasing local, state, and federal funding to sustain County investments in the early childhood system of care.

For over 20 years, these service integration and systems building functions have become a cornerstone of First 5's strategy to promote and create an equitable and sustainable early childhood system of care in Santa Cruz County. Central to that strategy is the role that First 5 plays leading the coordination and evaluation of the county-wide Thrive by 5 initiative in partnership with the Human Services Department and the Health Services Agency, with guidance from an Advisory Committee established by the First 5 Santa Cruz County Commission. In addition to Thrive by 5, First 5 has expanded the implementation of its communications plan, supported multiple community engagement activities and continued to play an active role in systems-building efforts led by First 5 partners.

- **Thrive by 5.** In January 2017, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors established the Thrive by Three Early Childhood Fund to improve outcomes for the County's youngest children and their families. In May 2022, the Board expanded its scope to Thrive by 5, creating greater alignment with other early childhood initiatives and funding streams. First 5 and its Thrive by 5 partners have since adopted the following strategic goals and community-level impacts:

  Children and families are healthy

  - Early access to prenatal care
  - Healthy births
  - Preventive health care
  - Access to nature, open space

  Children and families are ready for kindergarten

  - Access to quality child care and early learning programs

  Children live in safe, nurturing families

  - Assets that promote resilience
  - Parent and caregiver well-being
  - Safe families and home

  Families have resources to support children's optimal development

  - Economic security and stable housing

  In FY 2025-26, First 5 and its Thrive by 5 partners have:

  - **Enrolled** 209 families of children from prenatal to age 5 in the County's home visiting programs: Nurse-Family Partnership, Trauma Informed Approach (TIA) Field Nursing, and Families Together.
  - **Refined** the CalWORKs coordinated referral process through the Coordinated Referral Workgroup. All 33 CalWORKs participants contacted agreed to a referral, and 29 participants received a total of 72 milestone incentives (valued at $3,600) for participating in home visiting.
  - **Hosted** four Thrive by 5 Learning Collaborative sessions for partners on topics including doula services, safe sleep, human trafficking, and early education resources for families, among others.
  - **Redirected** $100,000 in Thrive by 5 Early Learning Scholarship funds to emergency bridge funding for Head Start and Early Head Start in October 2025. This bridge funding helped sustain services for about 250 young children during the federal government shutdown.

- **Supported** HealthySteps, an interdisciplinary, evidence-based pediatric primary care program that served 3,543 children in FY 2025-26 at Salud Para La Gente and Santa Cruz Community Health clinics.
- **Convened** four meetings of the Thrive by 5 Advisory Committee on topics including Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Medi-Cal and Head Start updates, and supporting immigrant families with young children, among others.
- **Completed** a Comprehensive Fiscal Analysis with Prenatal to Five Fiscal Strategies. Its four recommendations will help guide future investment, workforce, and system-capacity efforts across the Thrive by 5 system of care.

- **Communications and Community Engagement.** First 5 Santa Cruz County developed a draft Communications Plan integrating the *Annual Evaluation Report* with priorities from the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan, which aims to build a connected, bilingual, equity-centered communications ecosystem that shares impact stories and data, engages families, partners, funders, and policymakers, and strengthens trust, participation, and advocacy. First 5's communications plan continues to focus on increasing awareness of early childhood development, offering resources for families and early care and education providers, and promoting the agency's programs and partnerships both locally and state-wide. First 5 has continued to address equity and access by consistently engaging Spanish language translation and interpretation services for its website, newsletter, outreach materials, and community engagement.

  The continued focus of this communications plan is guided by four goals:

  - **Increase Awareness** – Ensure families, policymakers, and Community Based Organizations know First 5's impact, priorities, and resources.
  - **Drive Engagement** – Inspire families and partners to access all services and benefits that they are eligible for, share content, and participate in events.
  - **Support Advocacy** – Give policymakers and leaders compelling and accurate data and real stories to inform policy and funding.
  - **Build Trust & Relationships** – Establish First 5 as a trusted brand and go-to source for early childhood development information in Santa Cruz County.

- **DataShare Santa Cruz County.** DataShare is a county-wide data sharing system designed to share data on a variety of factors that affect the well-being of residents in the county. DataShare's mission is to provide an accessible, comprehensive, and reliable resource for local, regional, and national data that is available to everyone. DataShare Santa Cruz County envisions an equitable, thriving, and resilient community where everyone shares responsibility for creating the social, economic, and environmental conditions necessary for health and well-being at every stage of life. The website is an interactive data platform with local, state, and national data that allows users to explore and understand information about our local community. The site holds robust data and indicators in the areas of health,

economy, education, environment, government and politics, public safety, transportation, and social environment. In FY 2025-26, DataShare served as a source for community-level indicators in the Thrive by 5 report, including data on health insurance coverage among young children. To learn more, visit: https://www.datasharescc.org/

- **Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network.** Building on a series of successful legislative visits and policy wins for early childhood in 2017, First 5 Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties joined forces in FY 2017-18 to help form the tri-county Central Coast Early Childhood Advocacy Network (CCECAN). Representing over 94,000 children ages 0-8, CCECAN is a collaboration of organizations and individuals in the tri-county area committed to strengthening and advocating for policies and systems change at the state and local level that will support thriving children and families. To learn more, visit: https://www.ccecan.org/

- **Cradle to Career.** Grown out of the Live Oak Cradle to Career place-based initiative, a nascent idea in 2013 championed by former Supervisor John Leopold, today, C2C is a results-based collaboration between parents and local education, health, and social service leaders in two school districts in the county. C2C's mission is to work collectively to empower families, deliver resources, and advocate for equitable and inclusive support systems to eliminate disparities and ensure all Santa Cruz County children thrive in their education, health, and character. To learn more, visit: https://c2cscc.org/

- **Oral Health Access.** Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County (OHA) was created in 2016 as a steering committee made up of community leaders and organizations, dental and medical clinics, and educators to address oral health needs in Santa Cruz County. Led by Dientes Community Dental, the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency Public Health Division, and numerous community partners, the committee's mission is to improve the oral health of Santa Cruz County residents by uniting stakeholders and advocating for sound, measurable strategies that increase access to care and education. In the spring of 2024, First 5's Executive Director agreed to serve as Co-Chair in overseeing the implementation of OHA's new 2024-2028 Strategic Plan. Data in the FY 2025-26 Thrive by 5 report show that the share of children ages 0-5 with Medi-Cal insurance who visited the dentist annually rose, with the largest gains among children under age 1, likely reflecting the impact of the First Tooth, First Birthday campaign. To learn more, visit: https://oralhealthscc.org/