



## FIRST 5 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY



# ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT



July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

October 2023

## Acknowledgements

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# HEALTHY CHILDREN

*First 5 Santa Cruz County is working to improve coordination across systems of care to increase access for young children to the health services they need to be ready to succeed in school and in life. First 5 believes in a family-centered approach that focuses on prevention and early interventions.*



First 5 Santa Cruz County is working to increase access to affordable quality health care for children 0-5, increase the use of preventative health care, and improve overall maternal, child and infant health.

- Increased access to affordable quality health care for children 0-5
- Increased use of preventive health care
- Improved maternal, infant, and child health

## Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program

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### Program Description

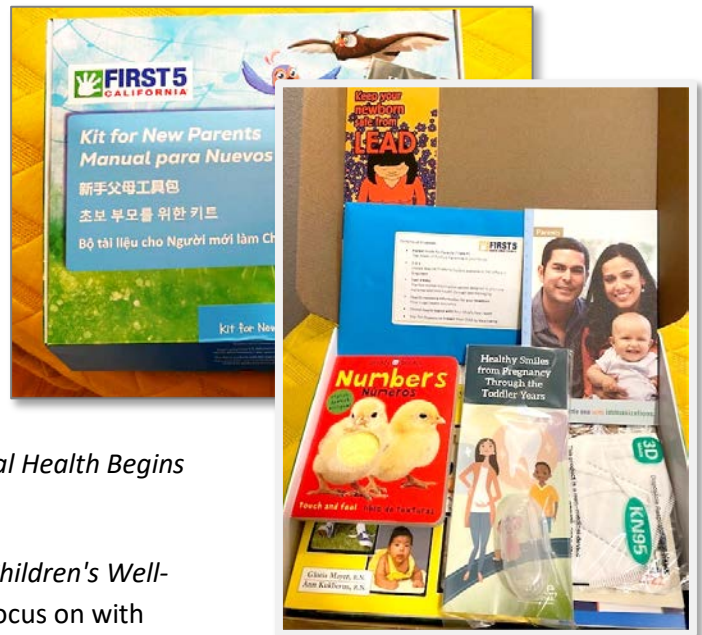
The Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program operates in three local hospitals: Watsonville Community Hospital, Dominican Hospital, and Sutter Maternity & Surgery Center of Santa Cruz. The program is financially supported in part by Kaiser Permanente Northern California Community Benefit Programs, Sutter Maternity & Surgery Center of Santa Cruz, and Dignity Health, Dominican Hospital. The main goals of the program are to provide Medi-Cal enrollment assistance to mothers and their newborns, establish a seamless Medi-Cal coverage process for Medi-Cal-eligible newborns, and to link those newborns to a medical home, all during a visit from a Newborn Enrollment Coordinator (NEC) before they leave the hospital.

In addition, during these Newborn Visits all new mothers are offered the First 5 California **Kit for New Parents** containing expert guidance for raising healthy infants and children.

- The standard *Kit for New Parents* includes many resources for parents, like the *Parent Guide*, *Numbers Touch-and-Feel* book, and more. In particular, parents are oriented to the *What To Do If My Child Gets Sick* book, which provides information in utilizing primary care appropriately, and clarifies what issues should prompt a visit to the emergency room, and which should be handled in the medical home.

- First 5 California also allows every county to customize these kits with three items. In Santa Cruz County, the three customized items that were added are:
  - An immunization flyer
  - A flyer about screening for lead
  - A “blue envelope”

The blue envelope counts as one item, but inside there is a 2-1-1 bookmark<sup>11</sup>, a Triple P Positive Parenting Program flyer, a “Text for Baby” flyer, a “Health Insurance Information for your Newborn” flyer, a “Top Ten Reasons to Protect Your Child by Vaccinating” flyer, and a “Dental Health Begins with Your Child’s First Tooth” flyer.



The “2023 California County Scorecard of Children’s Well-Being”<sup>12</sup> shows that the topics that NECs focus on with families at hospitals (such as immunizations, lead, and CalFresh) are helping our county have a high percentage of participation in these critical areas.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) allowed people enrolled in Medi-Cal to keep their insurance without having to fill out renewal applications. With the end of the pandemic and the end of these continuous coverage provisions, the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program has begun establishing processes and materials needed to assist clients in renewing their insurance so that they do not lose their Medi-Cal coverage.

In Santa Cruz County, Newborn Enrollment Coordinators (NECs) have become an integral part of the hospital team—including doctors, nurses, social workers, and lactation consultants—that supports these newborns and their families.

## Connecting with County programs

In FY20-21 First 5 began assisting with two new programs that were implemented in Santa Cruz County, which the Newborn Enrollment Coordinators (NECs) incorporated into their newborn visits. With these programs, families have the opportunity to have a state-wide student identification number (SSID) created for their newborn by the Santa Cruz County Office of Education and used to support the social, emotional, and academic development of their child from birth through 12<sup>th</sup>

<sup>11</sup> 2-1-1 is a program of United Way of Santa Cruz County that provides comprehensive information and referral services to County residents. It is a phone and text service that is available 24/7—and in 150 languages—that connects callers and texters to the health and human services available to them. During times of disaster, 2-1-1 also provides incident-specific information.

<sup>12</sup> Children Now, 2023 California County Scorecard of Children’s Well-Being, <https://scorecard.childrennow.org/>.



grade. In addition, families are offered the opportunity to voluntarily share their contact information with Ventures to connect them to their child’s Semillitas savings account, which is now established by Ventures for every newborn in Santa Cruz County upon birth. These two programs are described below.

- **State-wide Student Identification number (SSID)**

In October 2020, the Santa Cruz County Office of Education initiated the process of creating a “School ID” at birth for every child. This state-wide student identification number (SSID) is entered into the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) to maintain relevant information about a student, including key demographics, course data, staff assignments, and assessment scores. Typically, the SSID is assigned when a child enters public school or kindergarten, and stays with that child through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. With the SSID now being assigned at birth, the CALPADS database will allow early childhood programs to be aware of important information about their students, and by the time the children enter kindergarten, educators will have more data to help them provide the best educational resources to their students. This database will also allow the ability to follow students in and out of public schools and districts across the state.

- **Ventures’ Semillitas program<sup>13</sup>**



The Semillitas program initiates dedicated savings accounts that are set up at the time of a child’s birth, at no cost to the parents. Funds are held in this account for the child to be used for college or vocational education after high school. Parents can get a gift of up to \$50 when their child is born,<sup>14</sup> and as the child grows and achieves various health and educational milestones, more money is added to the account. The money comes from local government, state grants, and donations from partner organizations, philanthropic foundations, and individuals in the community.

Ventures has been working on establishing Semillitas in the County since 2017, and secured funding from philanthropic foundations to start piloting the program in early 2019 with women receiving prenatal care at a local health clinic. These mothers were the first to have accounts opened for their newborns in the fall of 2019. In October 2020, Semillitas was expanded to Watsonville Hospital, and in January 2021 the program went county-wide.

The Semillitas program is made possible by a partnership between Ventures, the County of Santa Cruz Health Services Agency (HSA), Santa Cruz County Office of Education, and numerous other partners including First 5 Santa Cruz County. Ventures creates an account for every newborn using birth information provided by HSA. First 5 began a data sharing partnership with Ventures in October 2020, and Newborn Enrollment Coordinators (NECs) started presenting information about the program to parents during their newborn visits.

<sup>13</sup> Ventures was formerly known as Santa Cruz Community Ventures. The Semillitas program was originally named “SEEDS” when this program was first started, but it was soon discovered that there were two other local programs already using the word “seeds” in their name. To avoid confusion, the name of this Ventures program was changed to the Spanish word for “little seeds”— *Semillitas*.

<sup>14</sup> Amount is based on household income and available funding.

With parents' consent, NECs provide their contact information to Ventures, so that Ventures can later connect them to their child's account that is already up and running.

First 5 partners with Ventures' Semillitas program, as it supports the objective that all Santa Cruz County children enter school ready to achieve their greatest potential. Studies have shown that children with college savings are three times more likely to attend college, and four times more likely to graduate than those without any college savings.<sup>15</sup> Studies have also shown that Children's Savings Account programs support the social-emotional development of children for whom accounts are established. A program like Semillitas is designed to support child development and encourage families to build high expectations and valuable lifelong financial habits.

Many families in our community are struggling with access to food. During their newborn visits to mothers in the hospital, the Newborn Enrollment Coordinators (NECs) also provide families with resources to apply for the CalFresh and WIC programs.

- **CalFresh Program**

The CalFresh Program issues monthly electronic benefits that can be used by families to buy food. NECs assist families to add their newborns to their existing CalFresh accounts, which in some cases can contribute to families getting more money for food. For those families that are not already enrolled in CalFresh, the NEC provides parents with resources that allow them to apply for CalFresh with a trained Community Outreach Coordinator.

- **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program**

WIC is a nutrition program that serves pregnant women, breastfeeding women, postpartum women, infants, and children up to the age of 5. WIC benefits include the California WIC Card for families to purchase food, and nutrition education. Most children up to the age of 5 and pregnant women—who have Medi-Cal insurance—qualify for WIC, and NECs encourage all mothers with Medi-Cal insurance to enroll in WIC. For those mothers who are not enrolled but indicate that they are interested in applying for WIC, the NEC provides them with the resources to apply.

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<sup>15</sup> Beer, A., Ajinkya, J., & Rist, C. (2017). *Better Together: Policies that Link Children's Savings Accounts with Access Initiatives to Pave the Way to College*. Institute for Higher Education Policy and Corporation for Enterprise Development.

**One Newborn Enrollment Coordinator Story**

A Newborn Enrollment Coordinator’s goal is to see every mother who delivers at our three local hospitals, or to follow up by phone with her once she is home.

A Newborn Enrollment Coordinator (NEC) followed up with a mother who had delivered her baby over the weekend. When the NEC called her, the mother was confused about getting health insurance for the baby, and the NEC was able to assist her by answering her questions and helping her find out if she already had Medi-Cal insurance.

It turned out that even though the mother thought she had lost her Medi-Cal coverage, her Medi-Cal insurance was still active. The NEC was able to assist the mother in linking her newborn to her Medi-Cal case and assisting the mother with updating her insurance information at the hospital. Since Medi-Cal was her secondary insurance, Medi-Cal would be able to cover the cost for anything that her primary insurance did not cover during her delivery. The mother was very happy with the assistance she received.

Having a NEC at each hospital is crucial. Through these face-to-face or phone conversations, a NEC can guide a family in determining their health insurance needs, accessing Medi-Cal, and utilizing their health coverage.

- First 5 Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program

**Population Served**

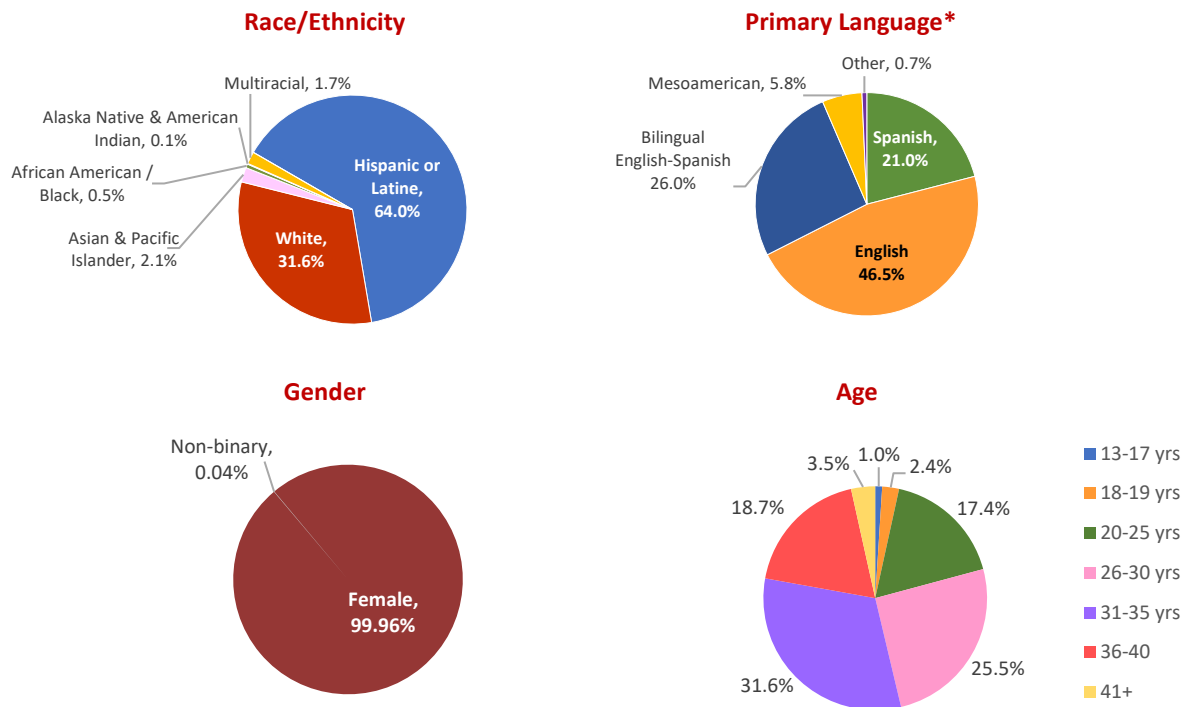
	Newborns assisted with Medi-Cal enrollment, and connected to County programs	Privately insured newborns connected to County programs	Newborns provided with insurance options and other essential resources <sup>1</sup>	2022-23 Total
Newborns	1,313	693	342	2,348
Mothers <sup>2</sup>	1,290	675	338	2,303

Source: (Population) First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023. (Application types) First 5 Apricot database, 2022-2023.

<sup>1</sup> This includes newborns where the mother was: privately insured and not living in Santa Cruz County (SCC); privately insured and living in SCC, but who declined having the NEC provide their information to the Semillitas and SSID programs; or already enrolled in Medi-Cal and living in SCC but did not want assistance from the NEC with their child’s Medi-Cal paperwork.

<sup>2</sup> Newborns are not the only clients benefitting from the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program. Recognizing that the mothers visited by NECs are receiving an increasing number of referrals and resources, beginning in FY21-22 they are now also included in this calculation of the population served by this program.

**Figure 14: Demographics of Mothers visited via the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program (2022- 2023)**



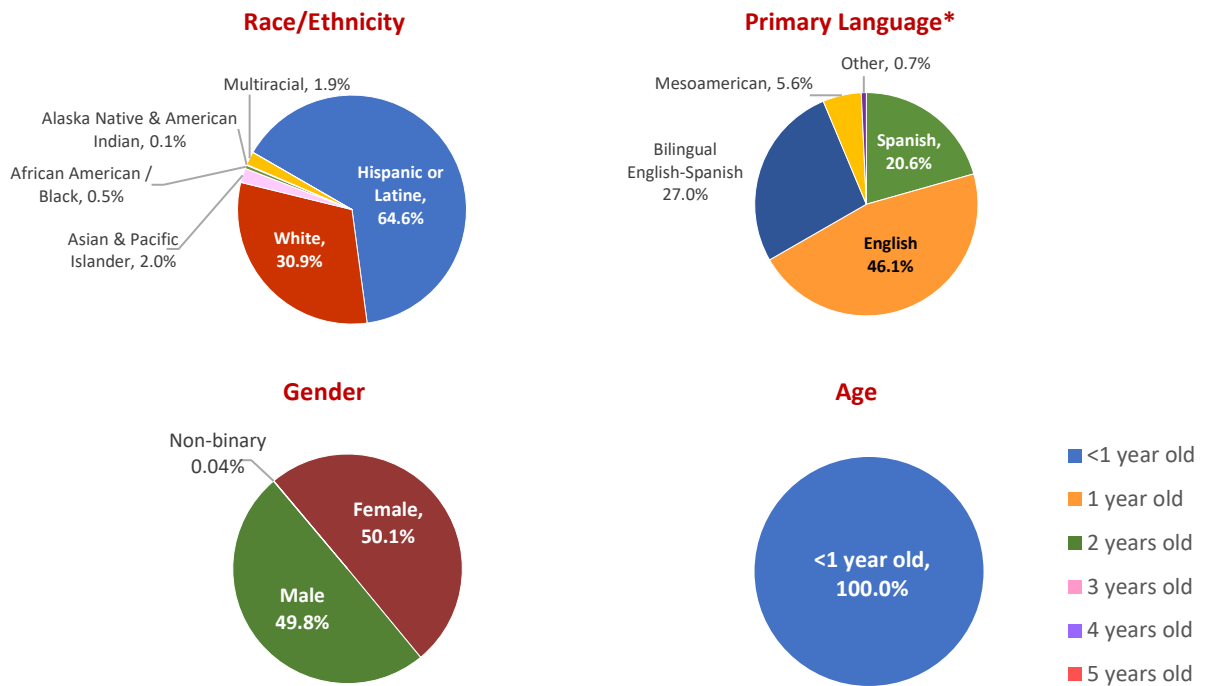
Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.

\* “Mesoamerican” languages include Mixtec, Oaxacan, and Zapoteco. “Other” language options include Multilingual, Bilingual-Other, and other languages.

N: (Ethnicity)=2,030, (Language)=2,303, (Gender)=2,298; (Age)=2,301.



Figure 15: Demographics of Children benefitting from the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program (2022- 2023)



Source: First 5 CCD database for July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023.  
 \* “Mesoamerican” languages include Mixtec, Oaxacan, and Zapoteco. “Other” languages include Multilingual, Bilingual-Other, and other languages.  
 N: (Race/Ethnicity)=2,017; (Primary Language)=2,348; (Gender)=2,348 (Age)=2,348.  
 Note: Newborns are assigned their mothers’ primary language.

## Outcomes

### Enrolling newborns in health insurance

Data from 2022-23 show how successfully this program has been providing **services to mothers and their newborns** born in Santa Cruz County hospitals.

- Of all births that occurred in Santa Cruz County hospitals in 2022-23, **99%** received a newborn visit from a Newborn Enrollment Coordinator (NEC) while in the hospital or via phone, and **98%** of those visited received a *Kit for New Parents* (or already had one).
- Of all mothers with births paid by Medi-Cal, **nearly all** were assisted by a NEC to complete a Medi-Cal Newborn Referral application for their new baby.

In 2021-22, Santa Cruz County **was one of only nine counties** in California where at least half of the families with new babies received a *Kit for New Parents*.\*

In actuality, almost **98%** of ALL mothers who gave birth in Santa Cruz County received a *Kit* from a Newborn Enrollment Coordinator as part of the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program.

\* First 5 California, *A Look at the Distribution of Kits Across California, 2021-22.*

- Of the mothers who were assisted with a Medi-Cal Newborn Referral application for their baby by a NEC, **99.9%** (*all but one*) had identified a preferred primary care provider (PCP) or clinic for their child, and were offered help by the NECs to schedule the first appointment for the newborn.

Figure 16: **Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program project statistics (2022- 2023)**

PROGRAM COMPONENT	WATSONVILLE COMMUNITY HOSPITAL	DOMINICAN HOSPITAL	SUTTER MATERNITY & SURGERY CENTER OF SANTA CRUZ	TOTAL
Total Number of All Births in Santa Cruz County hospitals <sup>1</sup>	835	844	690	2,369
Total Number of Newborns Visited <sup>2</sup>	837	836	675	2,348 99.1%
Number of Kits for New Parents distributed <sup>3</sup>	830	834	646	2,310 98.4%
Total Number of Births paid by Medi-Cal <sup>4</sup>	745 <sup>4</sup>	430 <sup>4</sup>	138 <sup>4</sup>	approximately 1,313 <sup>4</sup>
Number of Completed Newborn Medi-Cal Applications <sup>5</sup>	742	443	128	1,313
Number of Newborn Medi-Cal Applicants who have identified a Preferred Primary Care Provider or Clinic for their newborn, before discharge	742	442	128	1,312 99.9%

Source: (County births, Medi-Cal births at hospitals) Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency, Public Health Division; (Visits, Kits, Application assistance data) First 5 Santa Cruz County, Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program records, 2023.

<sup>1</sup> This includes all births at Santa Cruz hospitals, regardless of the mother's County of residence.

<sup>2</sup> This includes the number of newborns whose mothers received a visit (i.e., twins and triplets will be counted individually), regardless of insurance status. The total number of newborns visited by NECs may be higher than the reported number of births in hospitals. Babies born outside the hospital (e.g., homebirths, born in an ambulance) are not counted as "hospital births," but these mothers may go into the hospital after the birth, where they then receive a newborn visit.

<sup>3</sup> This includes the number of children whose parents received a Kit during their current Newborn visit, and also those whose mothers already had a Kit from a previous service.

<sup>4</sup> The reported numbers of births paid by Medi-Cal at each hospital is a very close approximation. These numbers are calculated by combining two sources of data: 1) Each hospital reports the number of birth certificates where Medi-Cal was the mother's **primary** insurance, and 2) NECs report the number of mothers they assisted where Medi-Cal was their **secondary** insurance. Together, these numbers represent almost all births paid by Medi-Cal, either as the mother's primary or secondary insurance. Note that these reported numbers may have some inaccuracies, due to the different sources of these data and the differing methods of collecting insurance information and identifying Medi-Cal coverage (both primary and secondary). Therefore, this reported number of Medi-Cal births should be considered very close to the exact number.

<sup>5</sup> These newborn Medi-Cal application numbers reflect the actual number of newborns born during the fiscal year who were assisted with Medi-Cal applications, where Medi-Cal was the mother's primary or secondary insurance. Although there are challenges in identifying the exact number of Medi-Cal eligible children born in all three hospitals, and although some mothers may themselves decline any assistance from NECs, these results still indicate that NECs helped complete Newborn Medi-Cal applications for nearly all births paid by Medi-Cal.

## Oral health

As part of the effort to promote the “First Tooth, First Birthday” campaign throughout Santa Cruz County, First 5 Santa Cruz County plays a key role in talking to families about visiting the dentist through the efforts of Newborn Enrollment Coordinators (NECs). During their Newborn Visits, NECs offer all new mothers the *Kit for New Parents*. Among the numerous resources and information provided in this *Kit* are materials addressing the importance of early dental care, such as the “*Dental Health Begins with Your Child's First Tooth*” flyer, and even a finger toothbrush.

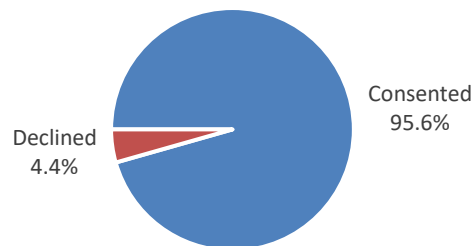
Reports of dental health utilization among children insured by Medi-Cal<sup>16</sup> suggest that the “First Tooth, First Birthday” campaign in Santa Cruz County may have been effective in encouraging more families to make dental visits for their children, and particularly for their children ages 1-2.

- **Annual dental visits:** In 2021, almost **52%** of children ages 1-2 with Medi-Cal insurance in Santa Cruz County had an annual dental visit, compared to almost **33%** across the State.

## State-wide Student Identification number (SSID)

- **Student Identification numbers:** Between October 2020 and June 2023, First 5 Newborn Enrollment Coordinators (NECs) obtained consents from 4,572 mothers (96% of all eligible mothers) to provide their information to the County Office of Education for the purpose of creating a SSID for their newborn.

Figure 17: **Percentage of eligible Mothers visited by NECs (Oct. 2020 – June 2023), who consented to have their contact information shared with COE**



Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County, Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program records, 2023.  
N = 4,782.

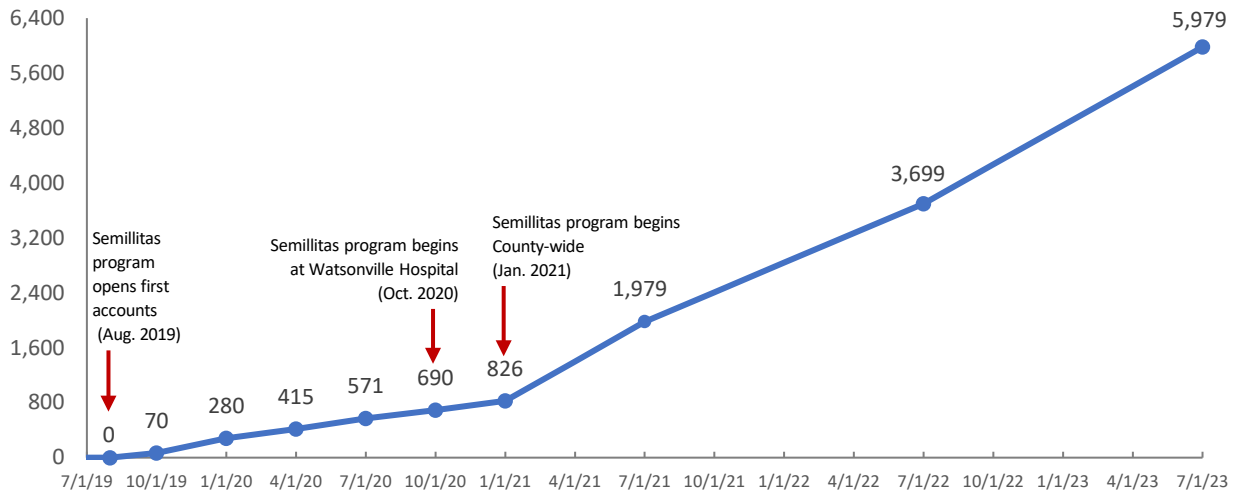
<sup>16</sup> Department of Health Care Services, Medi-Cal Dental Services Division, *Dental Utilization Measures and Sealant Data by County and Age Calendar Year 2013 to 2021 and Dental Utilization Measures and Sealant Data by Age Groups Calendar Year 2013 to 2021*, California Health and Human Services Open Data Portal, 2023.

## Ventures' Semillitas program

Results from this program show that increasing numbers of newborns are getting set up with dedicated savings accounts.

- **Number of Accounts Opened:** Since the program began (between August 2019 – June 2023), a total of 5,979 Semillitas accounts have been opened.

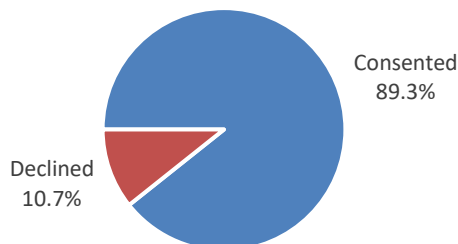
Figure 18: Growth of the total number of Semillitas accounts opened



Source: Ventures, Program records, 2023.  
Note: Previous years' totals may be adjusted to reflect updated numbers.

- **Number of mothers consenting during Newborn Visits to share their contact information:** Between October 2020 and June 2023, First 5 NECs have obtained consents from 4,272 mothers to provide their contact information to Ventures for the purpose of receiving more information about their child's Semillitas account. This equates to 89% of all eligible mothers who received a Newborn Visit.

Figure 19: Percentage of eligible Mothers visited by NECs (Oct. 2020 – June 2023), who consented to have their contact information shared with Ventures



Source: First 5 Santa Cruz County, Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program records, 2023.  
N = 4,782.

- **Oral health milestones:** County partners Dientes and Salud Para La Gente continued making payments into Semillitas savings accounts for accomplishing important oral health milestones.
  - Dientes and Salud Para La Gente contributed these amounts to children’s Semillitas savings accounts:
    - \$50 for the child’s “first tooth or first birthday” visit
  - Dientes also offered these contributions:
    - \$25 for each of the child’s annual visits (ages 2-5)
    - \$50 for the child’s sealant visit (age 6)



## Ensuring access to food

In 2022-23, NECs connected mothers to these **food resources**:<sup>17</sup>

- **395** supplemental applications (CW8A) were completed to add newborns to their mothers’ existing CalFresh case
- **293** mothers and their newborns were provided with resources to apply for CalFresh
- **121** mothers and their newborns were provided with resources to apply for WIC

## Supporting Well-Child Visits

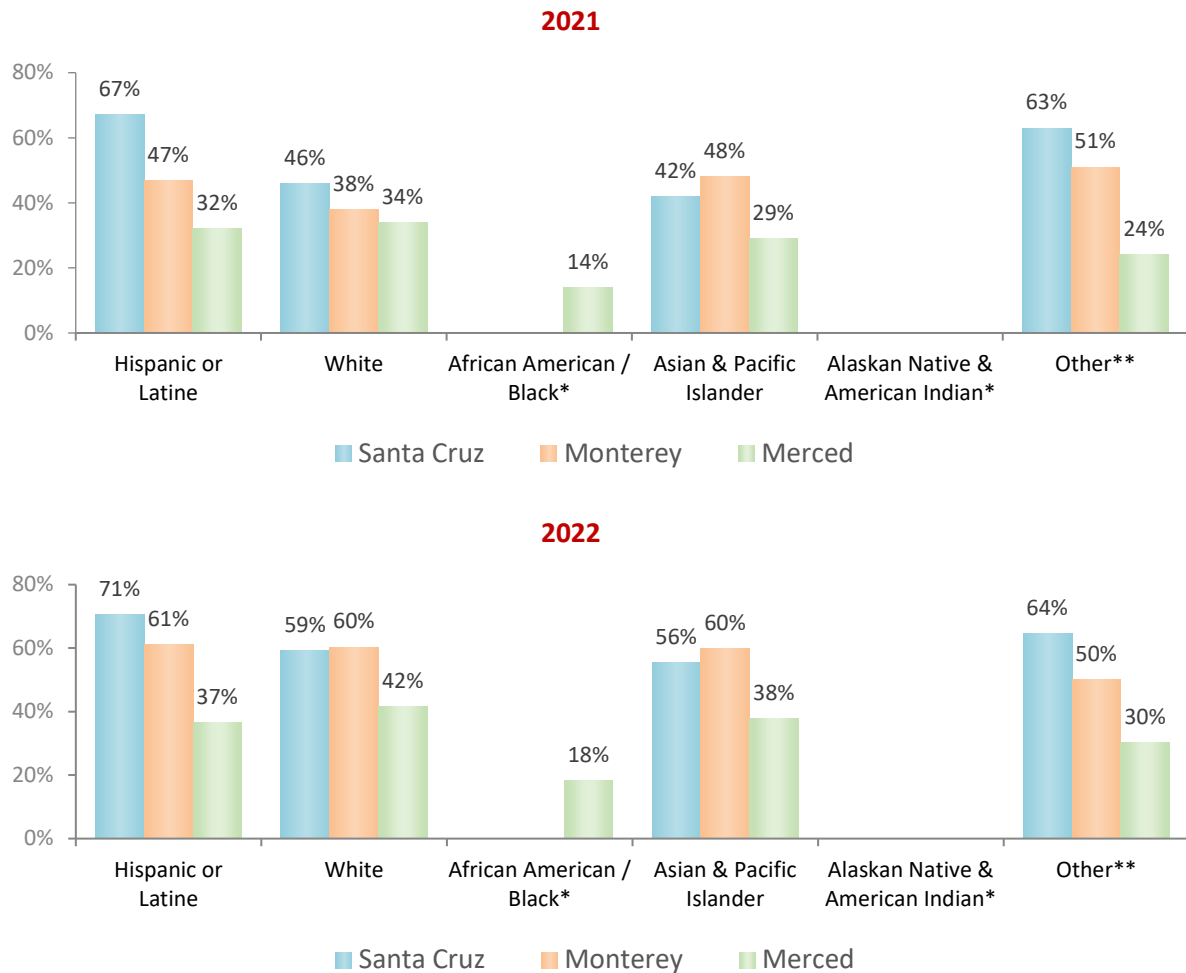
The Central California Alliance for Health (the Alliance) discusses the importance of infants getting their **well-child visits** during the first several months of their life, in order to be able to assess their growth and development, and address any issues before they become bigger problems.<sup>18</sup> One key benchmark is that a child should have at least six well-child visits with a provider within the first 15 months of life.

The figures below show the percent of children with Medi-Cal insurance who had at least six well-child visits within the first 15 months of life, disaggregated by race/ethnicity and the three counties served by the Central California Alliance for Health.

<sup>17</sup> First 5 Santa Cruz County, Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program data.

<sup>18</sup> Central California Alliance for Health, *Medi-Cal Health Education and Cultural and Linguistic Population Needs Assessment (PNA) 2022: Santa Cruz, Monterey, & Merced Counties Reporting Areas, 2022.*

Figure 20: Percentage of children with Medi-Cal insurance who received at least 6 Well-Child visits by 15 months of age, by Race/Ethnicity and County



Source: (2021) Central California Alliance for Health, *Medi-Cal Health Education and Cultural and Linguistic Population Needs Assessment (PNA) 2022: Santa Cruz, Monterey, & Merced Counties Reporting Areas*; (2022) Central California Alliance for Health, 2023.  
 \* Results for smaller populations have been suppressed to maintain confidentiality.  
 \*\* "Other" = Race/ethnicity was not noted.



## Emergency Department Visits

The services provided by the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program may also have had an effect on the **use of the Emergency Department (ED)** for children less than one year old who were covered by Medi-Cal.

### ED use of children covered by Medi-Cal

- At Watsonville Community Hospital, ED visits for infants under age 1 who were covered by Medi-Cal has decreased 49% between the year prior to the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program's launch and the most recent year of data (between 2008 and 2022).
- At Dominican Hospital, the number of ED visits for infants under age 1 who were covered by Medi-Cal has stayed relatively the same between the year prior to the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program's launch and the most recent year of data (between 2010 and 2022). Note that in 2010 this hospital was already well below the national rate of ED visits for infants, so these numbers would not be expected to decrease much further over time.

There were two major shifts in these trends that may have been influenced by the COVID 19 pandemic:

1. The dramatic decrease in ED visits between 2019 and 2020 may have been due to parents choosing not to use the hospital ED during the COVID-19 pandemic for low risk, non-specific symptoms.
2. Between 2021 and 2022, the sharp increase in ED visits suggests that these numbers are returning to pre-pandemic values.

Note that data show that both Santa Cruz County hospitals are well below the national rate of ED visits for infants under age 1.

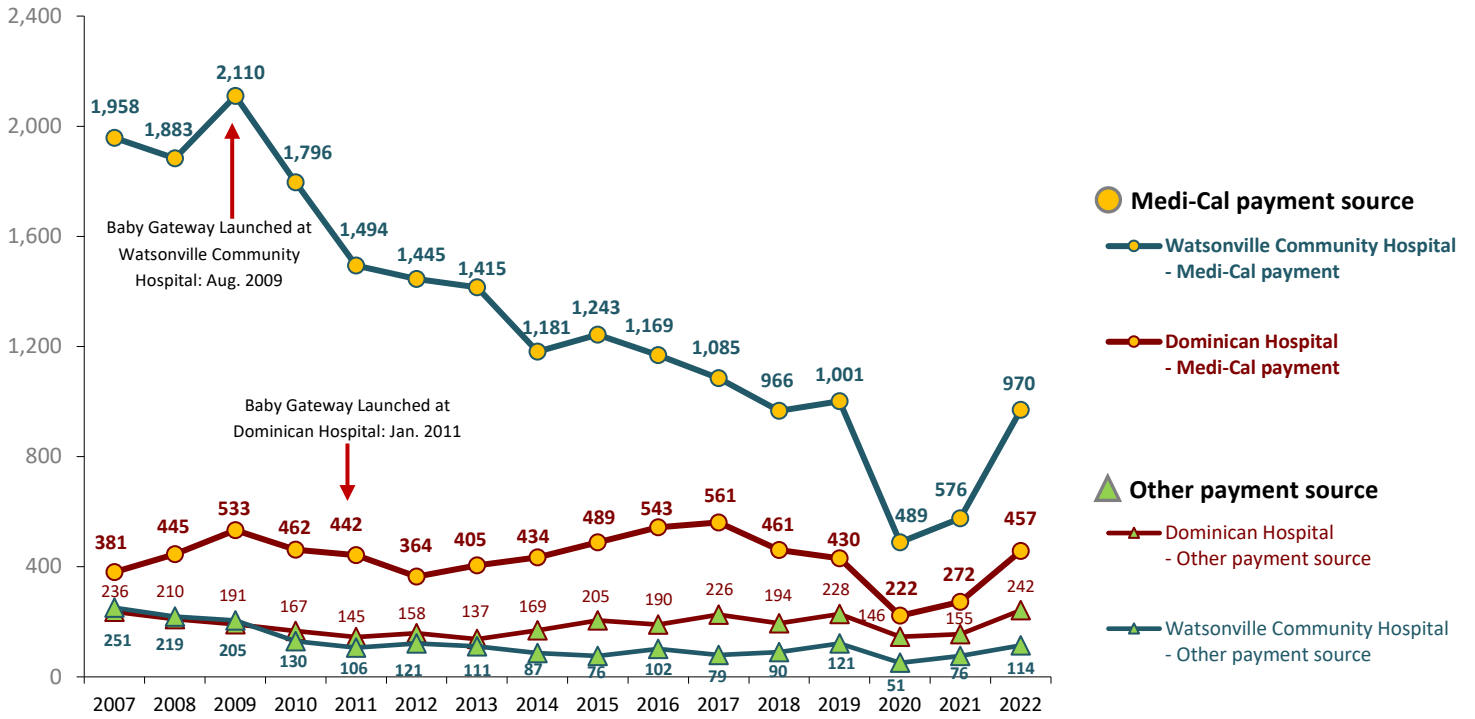
- In 2021 (the most current year of national data available), the national rate of ED visits for infants under age 1 was **103 per 100**,<sup>19</sup> which was much higher than the rates that year at both Dominican Hospital (**18 per 100**) and Watsonville Hospital (**28 per 100**).

### ED use of children covered by other payment sources

- The number of ED visits for infants under age 1 who were covered by other payment sources has stayed relatively level at both hospitals, suggesting that the Baby Gateway Newborn Enrollment Program is having the most impact on children covered by Medi-Cal.

<sup>19</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, *National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey: 2021 Emergency Department Summary Tables*, 2021.

Figure 21: Number of Emergency Department visits (Infants under 1 Year Old) – by Payment Method



Source: (ED visits) State of California, Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI), Information Services Division, *Emergency Department Data and customized reports*, 2023. (Population of Santa Cruz County children under age 1) California Department of Finance. Demographic Research Unit. *Report P-3: Population Projections, California, 2020-2060 (Baseline 2019 Population Projections; Vintage 2023 Release)*. Sacramento: California. July 2023.