

Press Release

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Oral Health Hero Award Nominations Open Recognizing Commitment to Expanding Access to Care

Santa Cruz County - Nominations are open for the 2021 Oral Health Hero Awards that recognize outstanding commitment to improving oral health for the underserved in Santa Cruz County.

This year, the Santa Cruz Oral Health Access Committee will honor two community members who have gone above and beyond in their passion for expanding access to oral health care. One award will go to a dental professional such as a dentist, hygienist, or staff from a dental office who goes the extra-mile to promote oral health to underserved patients. The other award will go to a non-dental professional who has promoted the importance of oral health through their own work and engagement in the community. Non-dental nominees work in public health, community non-profit organizations, education, or a medical setting.

One in four children in Santa Cruz have untreated tooth decay (cavities). In California, Latinx children and poor children experience more tooth decay and untreated tooth decay than other children. Many strides have been taken over the last 4 years to reduce this disparity. However, because of the pandemic, schools are closed along with the school-based dental care services, which many families depended on for their dental care. Dental offices are seeing patients at a reduced capacity to maintain COVID-19 safety protocols. The Oral Health Heroes are champions who make sure our most vulnerable community members receive the oral health care they deserve.

“Much needed preventative appointments had to be delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Dentists, healthcare providers and oral health educators have done a wonderful job changing their systems to meet State guidelines, while also striving to meet the needs of our underserved community,” said Dr. Sepideh Taghvaei, Dental Director of Dientes Dental Clinic.

Recognition of the Oral Health Heroes will be at the upcoming Oral Health Summit, held on February 4, 2021. Nominations are due by noon, December 31, 2020. For more information and to submit nominations: <https://bit.ly/OralHealthHero>.

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Oral Health Access Santa Cruz County's mission is to improve the oral health of Santa Cruz County by uniting stakeholders and advocating sound, measurable strategies that increase access to care and education. The Steering Committee represents a wide array of local health industry experts, community leaders and education advocates.