

NEWS RELEASE

Date: February 20, 2015

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Hawaii Dental Service Partners with Hawaii Primary Care Association
and Hawaii State Department of Health to Launch New
“Hawaii Smiles Program”**

**HDS Foundation to present \$137,500 check at
11th Annual HDS Tooth Fairy Fun Day
Sunday, February 22, 2015**

Hawaii received an “F” from The Pew Charitable Trusts in 2010 and 2011 for failing to improve the oral health of children in the state. Hawaii had the dubious distinction of being the “worst overall performer” among all 50 states and the District of Columbia for not meeting many benchmarks in children’s oral health.

That is about to change.

For the first time in about 10 years, the Hawaii Department of Health will be able to gather baseline oral health information on children to develop preventive programs and other initiatives that will have the greatest positive impact on oral health, thanks to a grant from the HDS Foundation and support from the Hawaii Primary Care Association.

The HDS Foundation will present a \$137,500 check to the Hawaii Department of Health to launch the new Hawaii Smiles Program at the 11th Annual HDS Tooth Fairy Fun Day at the Hawaii Children’s Discovery Center on Sunday, February 22, 2015, at 11:30 a.m. The grant supplements the Department of Health’s \$75,000 budget for the program.

The Hawaii Smiles Program will involve third grade students in 64 randomly selected elementary public and charter schools in four counties. In Honolulu, 26 schools will participate in the survey; 17 schools in Hawaii County; 12 schools in Maui County; and nine schools in Kauai County.

With the consent of their parents, the children will receive a free, one-minute screening using a flashlight and tongue depressor to check for untreated tooth decay. Those who need follow-up care will be referred to their dentist or a local clinic. All participating children will receive a toothbrush kit. The data will be used to gather county-level data and the screenings will be repeated every five years to identify any oral health trends.

“We want to make the screenings as simple as possible,” said Danette Tomiyasu, Deputy Director of Health Resources for the Hawaii State Department of Health. “Having a broad pool of children will give us a snapshot of the state of children’s oral health in Hawaii. The data we collect will enable us to develop programs to improve the oral health status of Hawaii’s children.”

“Studies show that untreated dental problems negatively affect school performance because of absences and difficulty eating, speaking and socializing,” said Robert Hirokawa, president of the Hawaii Primary Care Association. “Treating dental problems can lead to overall improvement in school performance for children.”

“We know that oral health affects our overall health and well-being. The HDS Foundation is very pleased to partner with the Department of Health on this initiative,” said Mark Yamakawa, president and CEO of HDS. “As the Department of Health identifies trends and develops programs, we’ll be sure to look at other ways the HDS Foundation can continue to support these valuable efforts.”

Background

Studies conducted in 1998, 1999 and 2005 showed children in Hawaii ages five to nine had twice the rate of tooth decay compared to children of the same age on the mainland. Since then, no other local study has been conducted on the progress of children’s oral health. The lack of evidence-based data has made it difficult for organizations to identify oral health issues and develop effective plans and programs to address the community’s needs.

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About Hawaii Dental Service

HDS, founded in 1962, is the largest dental benefits provider in the state, serving more than 600,000 members in Hawaii, Guam and Saipan. It has the largest network of dentists of all the dental plans offered in the state, with more than 95 percent of licensed, practicing dentists. HDS has been a part of Delta Dental Plans Association (DDPA), the nation’s largest and most experienced dental benefits company, since 1966. This affiliation gives members access to a nationwide network of participating dentists.

About the Hawaii Primary Care Association

The Hawaii Primary Care Association (HPCA) is a private, nonprofit corporation, incorporated in 1988. It is dedicated to fostering primary health care – dental, medical, behavioral health and health education services – for all Hawaii residents, especially vulnerable populations that are impacted by social and health inequities and disparities. The principal members of HPCA are the 14 federally qualified community health centers. There are six community health centers on Oahu; three on Hawaii Island, two on Maui and one each on Kauai, Molokai, and Lanai.