

Basics of Oral Health Literacy and OHL Toolkit



Presenters

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Disclosure

- Presenters do not have any conflicts of interest to disclose.

Agenda:

1. **Basics of OHL and Introduction to California's Oral Health Literacy Toolkit (HRA and CDPH)**
2. **Advancing Medical-Dental Integration Through Oral Health Literacy**
3. **OHL Approaches in School, Community Settings, and Public Health Initiatives**

What Is Oral Health Literacy? Why Does It Matter?



What Is Oral Health Literacy?

- Health literacy emerged in medicine in 1990s.
- **Oral health literacy** emerged in early 2000s.
- There are many ways to improve OHL.
- ADA strongly advocates for adoption of OHL techniques.

Traditional Approaches

- Advice-centered strategies.
- Assumes giving facts and recommendations elicits behavior change.



Newer Idea: Promote Health Literacy

3 levels of HL (HP 2030)

Individuals

- Can be health literate by using the skills needed to find, understand, evaluate, and use health information.

Healthcare Professionals

- Can be health literate by giving information in ways that improve understanding and ability of people to act on the information.

Organizations

- Can be health literate by providing equal, easy, and shame-free access to and delivery of health care and health information.

The Calgary Charter on Health Literacy





Why health literacy is important

- **Literacy is the single best predictor of a person's health status**, correlating more closely than age, income, employment status, education level, or racial or ethnic group.
- More than 2/3 of US adults lack understanding of health information (2003).

Audience Question

How much (%) of what the provider says do patients typically forget or misremember?



After a Clinical Visit

- People forget or misunderstand 50% to 80% of what a healthcare provider has said.





How Oral Health Literacy Helps Patients

- Lower rates of dental caries and periodontal disease.
- More use of preventive services.
- Better participation in their own care.
- More likely to get the care they need.

Using Plain Language

- Not always clear what is and is not plain language.
- Simple, everyday words.
- Several smaller words in place of a long one.
- Break information into small chunks.
- Most important information goes first.



How OHL Helps Dental Practices

- **Adopting OHL techniques in your practice can:**
 - Improve relationships with your patients by increasing their comfort and trust.
 - Increase patients' loyalty to your practice and encourage them to return.
 - Increase patients' adherence to instructions.
 - Improve equity of care by making your practice more accessible and welcoming to all patients.



The Health Research for Action Oral Health Literacy Toolkit (UCB)

Oral Health Literacy Toolkit

Designed to help providers:

- Understand how OHL affects patients.
- Understand the need to arrange language services.
- Learn basic OHL principles and adopt them in dental practices.
- Create a shame-free and patient-centered environment.



Oral Health Literacy
in Practice

OHL Guidebook

- Connect better with patients.
- Discover best practices.
- Implement OHL at every touchpoint.
- Use scripts & templates.

Adopting Health Literacy

The following pages suggest ways to implement health literacy in your practice, but you don't need to follow every suggestion. Try to keep the process manageable. This way, you can improve the patient experience without overwhelming your practice's resources.

Initial contact

First impressions matter. The more your patients feel welcome and cared for, the more likely they will want to participate in their care. Here are some tips for making the initial contact positive and focused on the patient.

- Ask if the patient has a preferred language.
- Have a friendly tone and speak slowly.
- Explain what will happen during the visit.
- Ask what questions they have.

? Questions for your practice from a patient's perspective:

- Has someone explained what I can expect during my appointment?
- Has someone told me what to bring to my visit?
- Can I easily read the signs and forms, even if I have limited eyesight?
- Are signs and forms available in the language I am most comfortable reading?
- Is the greeting from the front office person welcoming and friendly?
- Has someone offered to help with or explain the forms?
- Has someone asked about my preferred language?
- Am I being encouraged to ask questions about my care?
- Will I know what to do when I leave?

Create a safe and patient-centered environment

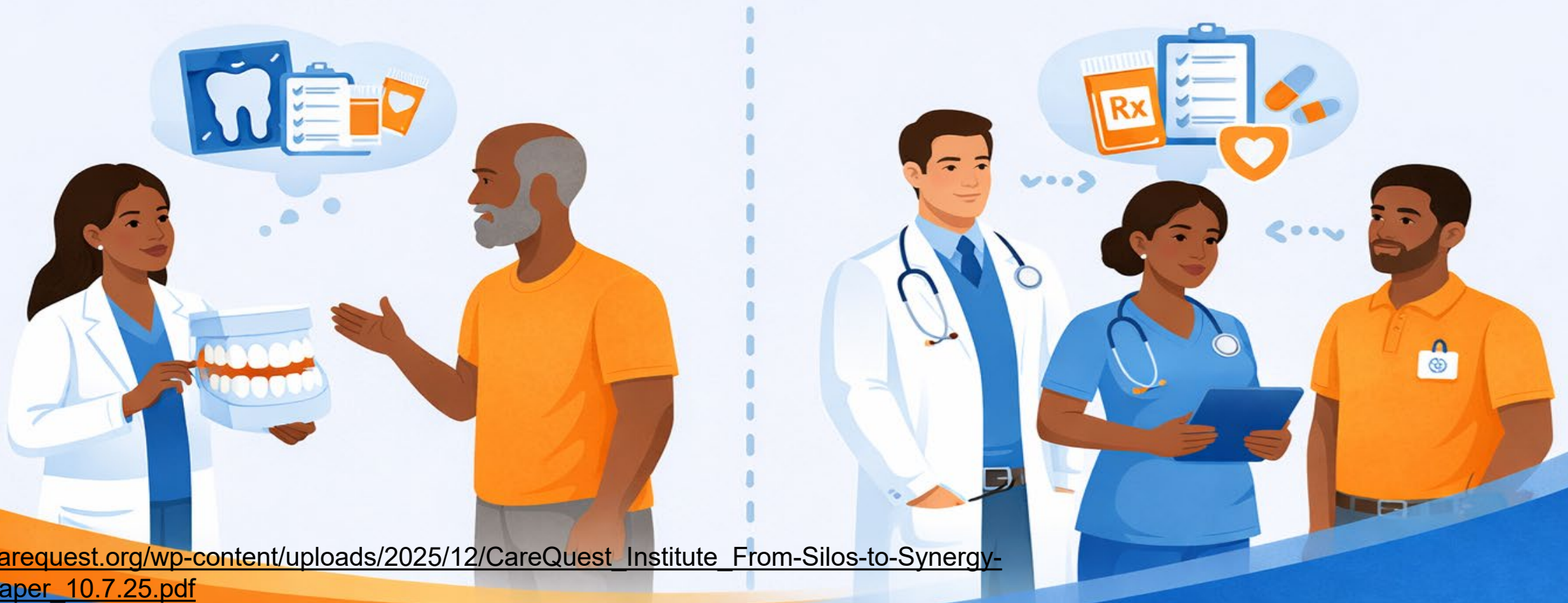
Coming to a new office with new routines can feel uncomfortable or intimidating. You can set up your office in ways that reduce patients' fear, shame, and discomfort. Some techniques for creating a patient-centered environment are practical, such as training staff to greet patients warmly. Others are about empathy. Imagine what it is like for a patient entering your practice for the first time. **Go through your practice site and ask yourself the questions above.**

What Providers are Saying About the Toolkit



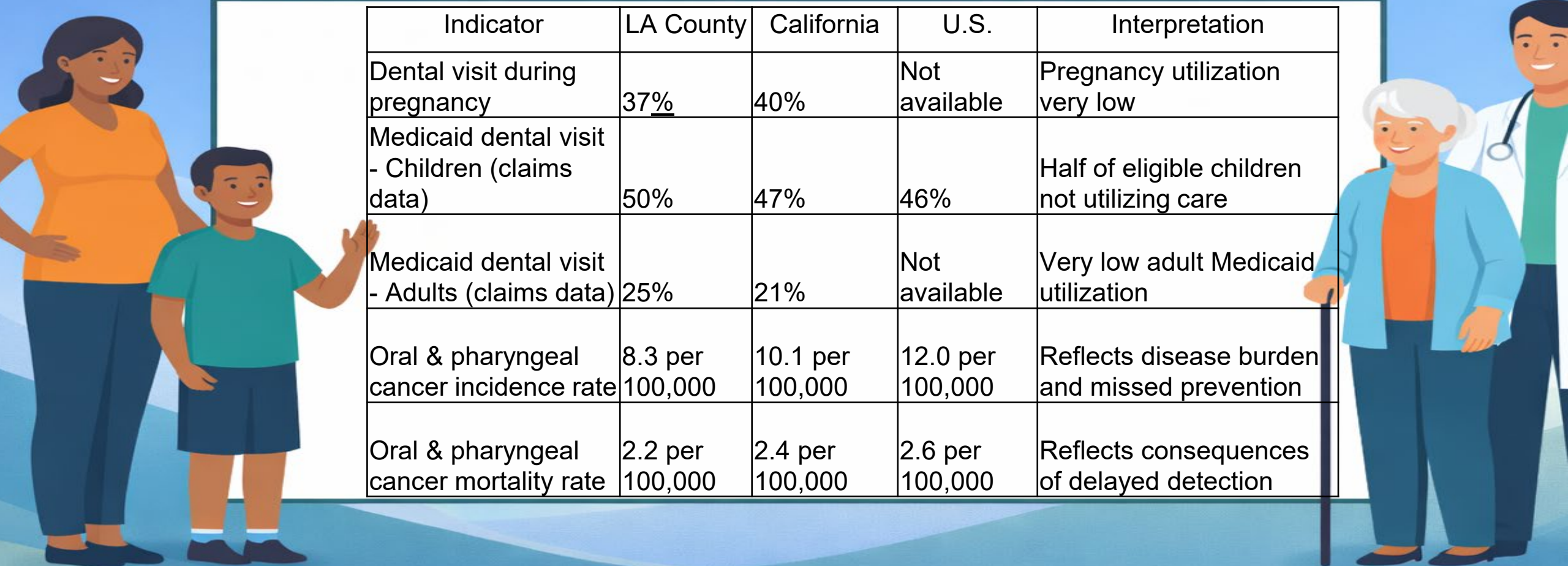
- “Thorough, detailed and informative.”
- “Very helpful—should be natural for a professional.”
- “Quality of dental treatments have improved.”
- “Helping kids and staff to have a healthy and friendly communication.”
- “Good patient feedback from using teach-back.”

Oral health has long been separated from the rest of health care, resulting in **missed opportunities** to prevent disease and promote whole-person health.



Dental Utilization Gaps in Los Angeles County

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ohp/docs/LA-OH-Data-Chartbook.pdf>



Indicator	LA County	California	U.S.	Interpretation
Dental visit during pregnancy	37%	40%	Not available	Pregnancy utilization very low
Medicaid dental visit - Children (claims data)	50%	47%	46%	Half of eligible children not utilizing care
Medicaid dental visit - Adults (claims data)	25%	21%	Not available	Very low adult Medicaid utilization
Oral & pharyngeal cancer incidence rate	8.3 per 100,000	10.1 per 100,000	12.0 per 100,000	Reflects disease burden and missed prevention
Oral & pharyngeal cancer mortality rate	2.2 per 100,000	2.4 per 100,000	2.6 per 100,000	Reflects consequences of delayed detection

From **Identifying Barriers** → A System-Level Solution



Key Barriers Identified:

- ✓ Limited coordination between **medical and dental** teams
- ✓ **Inconsistent referral workflows** and follow-up
- ✓ **Time** constraints during **medical visits**
- ✓ Lack of standardized oral health messaging

To better understand gaps in care coordination, exploratory discussions were conducted with medical teams.

Moving Toward Solution

2 Way Approach



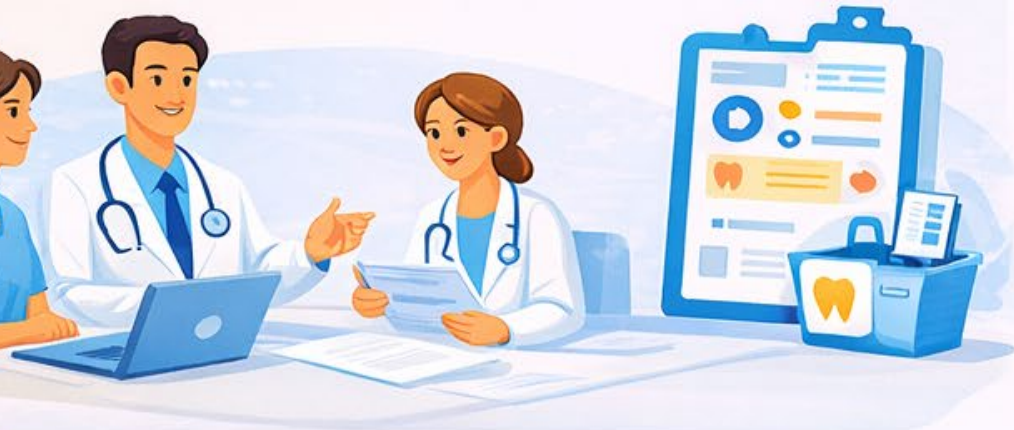
Work with Medical Teams on Operational Integration

Toolkits for medical clinics

Warm handoffs to dental providers

Structured referral workflows

Clear tracking and coordination processes



Build Patient Trust Through Oral Health Literacy

- ✓ **Consistent oral health messaging** across medical and dental teams
- ✓ **Caregiver education** using plain language and visual tools
- ✓ **Multilingual and culturally appropriate materials** for families
- ✓ **Community outreach** through schools, senior centers, and community partners

Health Literacy Reality

- Literacy is the single best predictor of health status
- Over 2/3 of U.S. adults struggle to understand health information

(Source: National Assessment of Adult Literacy)



Integration is not only about building referral pathways—it's about *ensuring patients understand, trust, and act* on those referrals.



Oral health literacy should extend beyond dental settings

Endocrinologists, OB providers, and primary care
teams reinforce prevention messages

Nurses, medical assistants and care teams
support patient education

Community partners and educators
strengthen prevention outreach

Consistent messaging improves patient
understanding and follow-through

Oral health becomes part of routine
health conversations



Promoting OHL & Teach-Back Techniques Can Help Medical Sites Without In-Office Dental Improve Access to Care



Better patient understanding



Improved referral completion



Increased access to dental care



What Is Teach-Back?

Enseñar lo aprendido

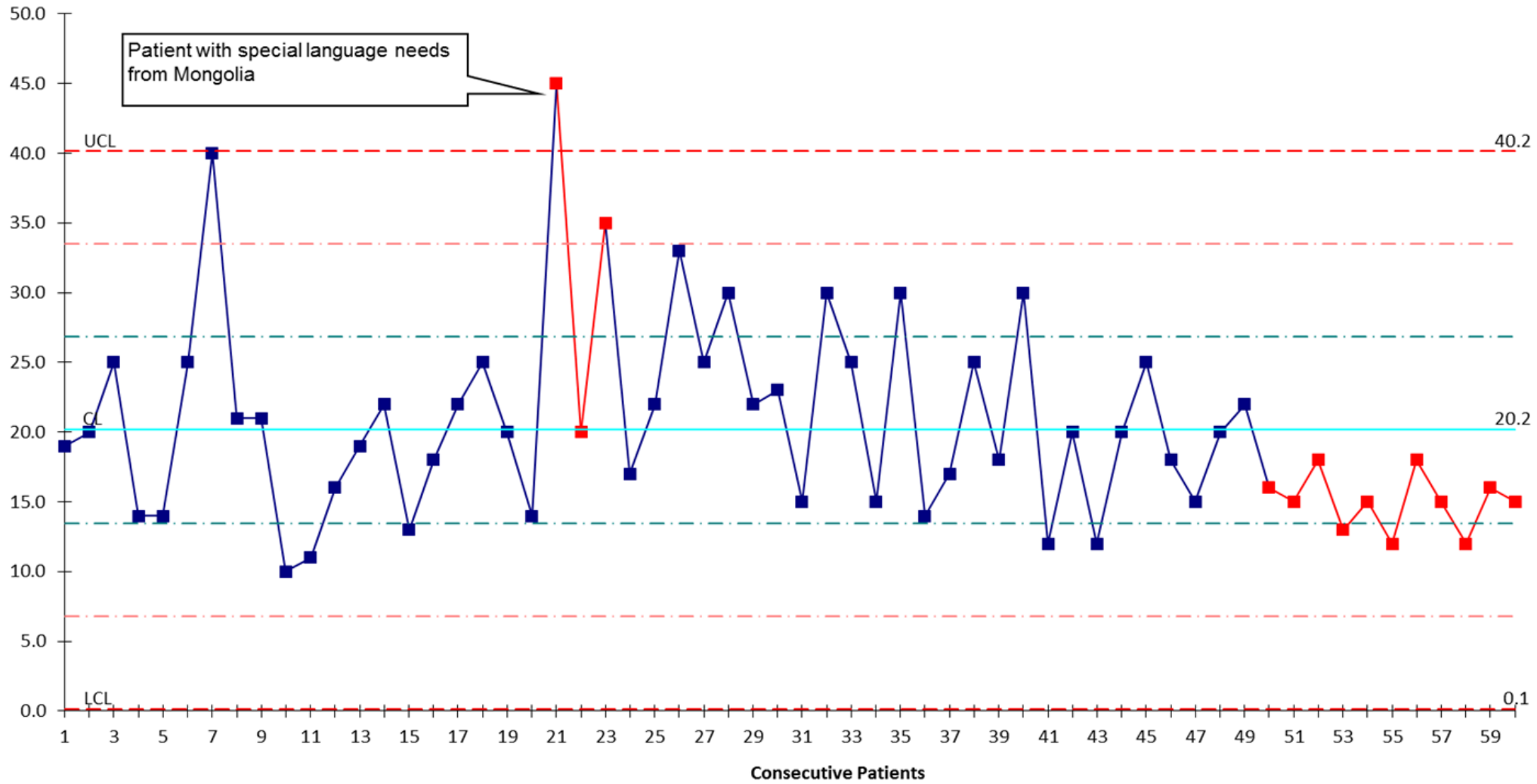
- Ask patients to explain instructions in their own words
- Checks how well the provider explained
- Works with interpreters or bilingual staff
- Promotes health equity through health literacy

Teach-Back Techniques



1. Organize what you want to say.
2. Explain the first part.
3. Ask the patient to explain it back.
4. If they don't understand, explain again in a different way.
5. Ask them to explain once more.
6. If they understand, move on to the next part.

Impact of using Teach Back (TB) on Patient Visit Time



Courtesy of Dr. Laura Noonan



Teach-Back Practice Booklet

Describes the teach-back method and explains how to use it.

Has several scenarios for practicing skills.

Available to download in English, Spanish, and Simplified Chinese.



What is
Teach-Back?



Enseñar lo
aprendido



复述教导

From Concept to Practice: What We Did at Our FQHC





Instead of debating integration — we tested it.

At our Los Angeles FQHC:

- ✓ Converted an unused pediatric medical exam room into a pediatric dental room
- ✓ Integrated same-day dental into well-child visits
- ✓ Started small: ages 6 months–3 years



Services focused on prevention:

-  Exams & caries risk assessments
-  Prophylaxis
-  Oral hygiene instruction
-  Nutritional counseling



Oral Health Literacy in Action: Age-Appropriate Tooth-Brushing Using Teach-Back Model

Measurable and Actionable Goal: Started with children ages 6 months to 3 years in our new Pediatric Dental room.

Started with one RDA to train on OHL material and teach-back with parents/caregivers.

Started with toothbrushing and oral care (0–3 years).

Created age-appropriate infographics and educational materials.

Staff Trained **all staff (RDAs, DAs, Even some Medical Assistants)** to use the same oral health messages.

Later expanded the model to **3–5-year-olds** with same process as well as for Nutritional counseling.

By implementing a toothbrushing routine into a playgroup setting, parents acquire the oral health literacy and education to know how to take care of their children's teeth from the beginning.



Shutterstock



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Toothbrushing Procedure for Children Ages Birth to One Year

- ❖ Make sure that each baby has their own infant-sized, soft-bristled toothbrush labeled with the baby's name. Use a finger brush, gauze, or clean cloth for babies without teeth
- ❖ Wash hands with soap and water before and after brushing each baby's teeth
- ❖ Caregiver should wear gloves and gloves should be replaced between each baby
- ❖ Parents/Guardian or caregiver will hold the infant in their lap and wipe baby's gums and teeth with a clean cloth, gauze, or finger brush or brush baby's teeth
- ❖ Brush babies' teeth with a small smear (rice-size amount) of fluoride toothpaste as soon as the first tooth comes into the mouth
- ❖ Use new gauze/cloth each time to wipe baby's gums
- ❖ Rinse and store toothbrushes according to the Safety and Sanitation Guidelines

Impact and Future Goals

Follow-up retention: Increased 0–3-year-old patient follow-up appointment attendance (Power BI data shows kept appt rate rose from 22% to 37.24%).

Planned metric: Caries presence at recall for 3–5-year-olds (linking ICD-10 and CPT codes for caries diagnosis with treatment completion codes).

Treatment completion tracking: Piloting treatment completion code usage since last year for all pediatric patients I saw in age group 0–5.

Oral health was never meant to sit in a silo –
and together we have **the opportunity to change that.**

Thank you.

References

- **CareQuest Institute** – From Silos to Synergy: Integrating Oral Health into Whole-Person Care
- **LA County Department of Public Health** – Oral Health Data & Chartbook
- **CDC** – Oral Health Care During Pregnancy
- **UCSF** – Oral Health Literacy Toolkit
- **LA Trust for Children's Health** – Primary Care & Dental Integration Best Practices
- **CODA** – Interprofessional Education Standards

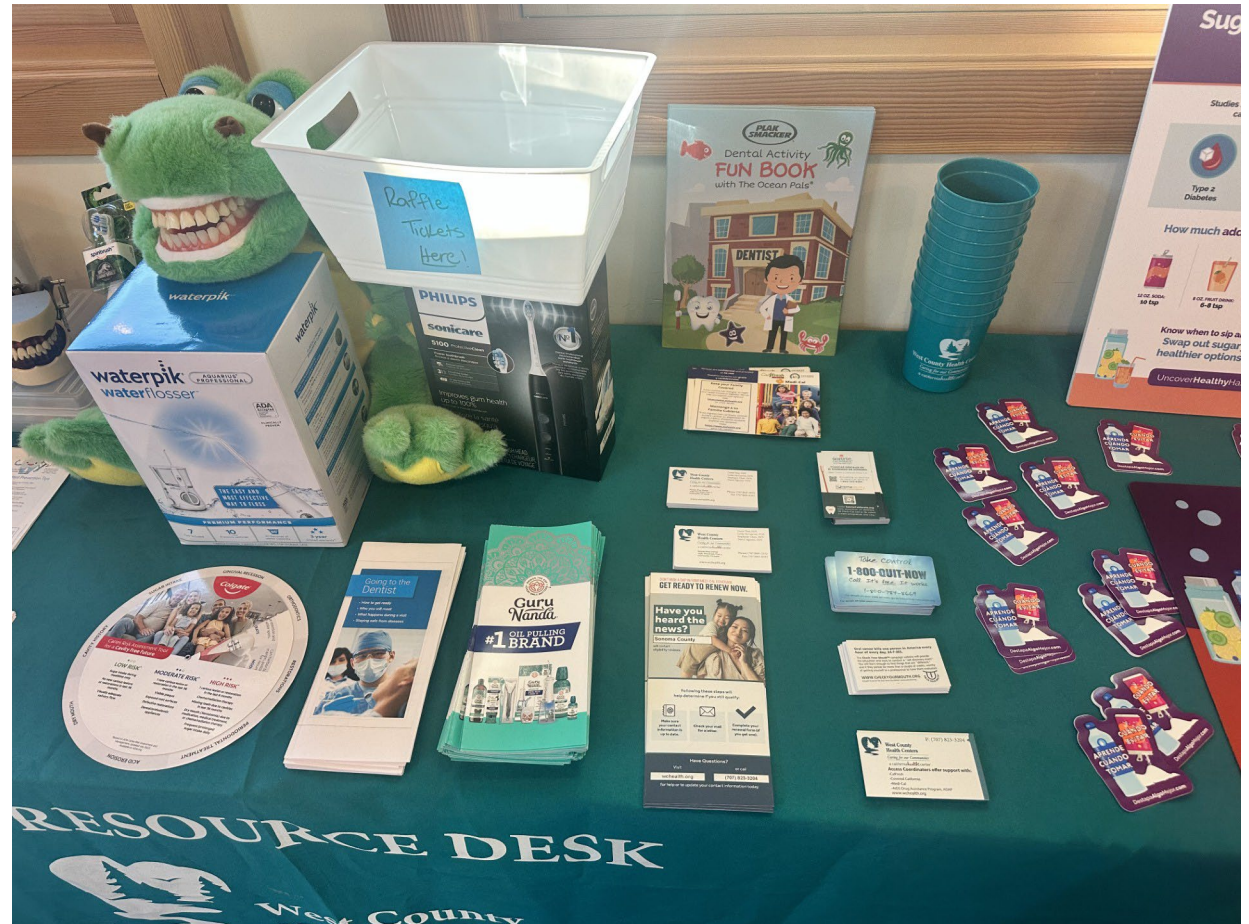


“By improving oral health literacy of our communities, we are improving the immunological fitness across households and future generations.”

Tooth Talk



Tooth Talk



ering Lifelong Oral Systemic Success

ective is to provide convenient oral health education, and to
le kids who need dental access to our West County dental clinics.

ville School Partnership

Back-To-School Tabling to provide oral health literacy
information and how to schedule an appointment at our
clinic

Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment Forms can be
completed through an exam at any of our dental clinics
throughout the year

Integrate “Oral Health Literacy” into education
curriculum

Externship Program

Partnership with Magnolia Project and Sonoma County Office of
Education (SCOE), WCHC hosted 4 teachers from Analy High School as
externship to educate teachers of our dental program and learn



Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment

California Department of Public Health
July 2022– Page 2 of 2

Section 2: Oral Health Data Collection (Filled out by a California licensed dental professional)

IMPORTANT NOTE: Consider each box separately. Mark each box.

Assessment Date: <input type="text" value="MM"/> - <input type="text" value="DD"/> - <input type="text" value="YYYY"/>	Untreated Decay (Visible Decay Present) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	*Caries Experience (Visible decay and/or fillings present) <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Treatment Urgency: <input type="radio"/> No obvious problem found <input type="radio"/> Early dental care recommended (caries without pain or infection; or child would benefit from sealants or further evaluation) <input type="radio"/> Urgent care needed (pain, infection, swelling or soft tissue lesions)		
<input type="text" value="Signature"/>	<input type="text" value="CA License Number"/>	<input type="text" value="MM"/> - <input type="text" value="DD"/> - <input type="text" value="YYYY"/>
<i>Licensed Dental Professional Signature CA License Number Date</i>		

*Check "Yes" for Caries experience if there is presence of untreated decay or fillings
Check "No" for Caries experience if there is no untreated decay and no fillings

Section 3: Follow-up to Urgent Care (Filled out by entity responsible for follow up)

Parent notified that child has urgent dental care need on:	<input type="text" value="MM"/> - <input type="text" value="DD"/> - <input type="text" value="YYYY"/>
A follow-up appointment for this child has been scheduled for:	<input type="text" value="MM"/> - <input type="text" value="DD"/> - <input type="text" value="YYYY"/>
Did child receive needed treatment?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No (If no, entity responsible for follow-up will be encouraged to check back in with parent) <input type="radio"/> I don't know

The law states schools must keep student health information private. Your child's name will not be part of any report as a result of this law. This information may only be used for purposes related to your child's health. If you have questions, please call your school.

Return this form to the school *no later than May 31st* of your child's first school year.

California law Education Code Section 49452.8 requires students enrolled in kindergarten in a public school (or in first grade if not previously enrolled in kindergarten) to present proof of having received an oral health assessment within 12 months of initial enrollment. The oral assessments are due to the school no later than May 31st of the school year.

AB 1260, which passed in September 2024, took effect on January 1, 2025. This new law clarifies that the existing Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA) requirement (EC 49452.8) will now apply to children enrolled in Transitional Kindergarten (TK). As a result, students enrolled in TK or K will be required to complete a KOHA form, ensuring earlier oral health screening and intervention.

Community Dental Program Coordinator

Commitment:

10 hours per week, flexible scheduling
November 25th – December 19th 2025

Position Overview

We are seeking a motivated high school junior or senior student to assist with documenting the activities and impact of community projects. This is a hands-on opportunity to learn about public health dentistry, community outreach, and professional communications while contributing to improve access to dental care in our community.

The intern will work directly with the dental team and will be responsible to lead to gather photos, stories, and data, that will document the impact of our work. This record will be shared with our organization, in which the works may be used for community engagement, grant reporting and

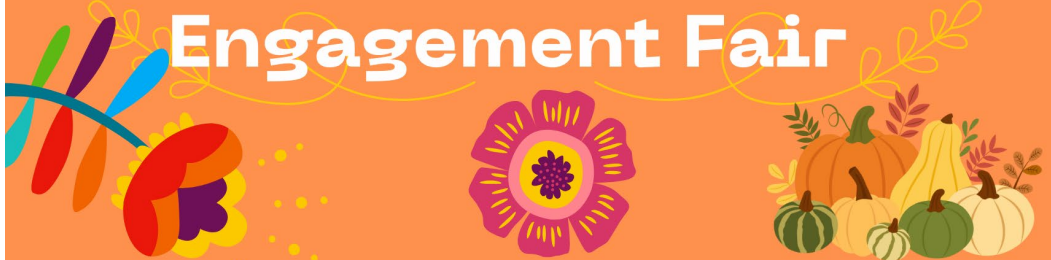


“This opportunity at West County Health Centers has given me tremendous growth in my own development as a person, and I will continue to use my communication, empathy, and passion to lead me through life as I explore my future in Healthcare.”



**Participating Partners
from past events**

Annual Fall Community Engagement Fair



Join us in the celebration of our
annual Fall Community
Engagement Fair!!!

10.25.2025

Activities | Food | Music | Prizes | Giveaways

 Guerneville School
14630 Armstrong Woods
Rd, Guerneville CA

 1pm-4pm



West County Health Centers

HALLOWEEN

SWITCH-WITCH

CANDY SWAP

NOV 3RD-7TH

8AM-5PM



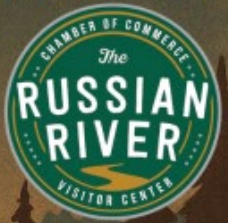
**TRADE HALLOWEEN CANDY FOR A FUN PRIZE
AT ONE OF OUR DENTAL OFFICES, AND ENTER OUR
RAFFLE FOR A CHANCE AT A GRAND PRIZE!**

**RUSSIAN RIVER DENTAL
16387 FIRST ST. 3RD FLOOR
GUERNVILLE**



**SEBASTOPOL DENTAL
6800 PALM AVE SUITE C1
SEBASTOPOL**

SPOOKY LITTLE BLOCK PARTY



When: OCTOBER 31, 2025

Where: LARK'S PARKING LOT

16251 MAIN ST, GUERNEVILLE CA 95446

Bring the family and enjoy some Halloween fun, a costume

Russian River Chamber of Commerce - Booth 1

Stephanie/ Duncans Mills Candle Co - booth 2

Heather/ Girl Scouts - booth 3

Margaret/ Friends of Rio Nido - booth 4

Yvette/ Saucy Mamas - booth 5

Lupe/Dinastia - booth 6

Delmar/ Mountainstar Jewelry - booth 7

Erin/Harvest Moon - booth 8

Jezra/ Sura Botanicals - booth 9

Kat Dodge - booth 10

Deanna/Drinkslynger - booth 11

Edgar/River To Coast Children's Services - booth 12

Karen/Dental Team - booth 13



You're Invited! ¡Están invitados!

Cooking in Community Cocinar en Comunidad

*Russian River Area families
with children are invited to:*

*Invitamos a familias con niños
de la región del Rio Ruso a:*

- Meet other young families
- Enjoy a delicious dinner
- Activities for kids
- Get free diapers & ingredients

- Conocer a otras familias
- Disfutar de una cena deliciosa
- Divertirse
- Pañales y ingredientes gratis

NOV 18, 2025 / 18 DE NOVIEMBRE DE 2025
5:00-7:00pm

Russian River Resiliency Center
16385 First Street, Guerneville

Must RSVP to save a spot

Favor de confirmar su asistencia para guardar un lugar
en español - Maria Esparza - 707-216-2119
In English - Karen Mitchell - 707-271-3308

Sponsored by



Dental Trivia + Toothbrush kits as prizes

Dental Health Questions:

- When should I start brushing my baby's teeth?
- When should my child first go to the dentist?
- Why take care of baby teeth if they fall out anyway?
- Is it okay for my child to fall asleep with a bottle or sippy cup?
- Does breastfeeding cause cavities?
- How often should young kids go to the dentist?
- Are pacifiers or thumb-sucking bad for teeth?
- How do I tell if my child has a cavity?
- How can I wean my child off the bottle?
- How do I find a dentist who sees babies or toddlers?

Stay tuned for tips, tricks, and interesting health facts all month long to help you make smarter drink choices for a healthier future! 🍌🍏

#RethinkYourDrink #HealthyChoices #SugarAwareness #DrinkWater #StayHydrated #RethinkYourDrink2024

¡Celebra Rethink Your Drink Todo el Mes! 🍷💧

Únete a nosotros para tomar decisiones más saludables con Rethink Your Drink, una iniciativa en todo California que anima a reducir las bebidas azucaradas y optar por opciones más saludables como el agua. Las bebidas azucaradas pueden llevar a riesgos graves de salud como la diabetes tipo 2, enfermedades del corazón y la caries dental.

¡Mantente atento todo el mes para recibir consejos, trucos y datos interesantes sobre la salud que te ayudarán a hacer mejores elecciones para un futuro más saludable! 🍌🍏

#RethinkYourDrink #EleccionesSaludables #ConcienciaSobreElAzúcar #TomaAgua #MantenteHidratado #RethinkYourDrink2024



West County Health Centers - WCHC Sep 20

Rethink Your Drink: Uncovering the Hidden Dangers of Sugary Drinks

Did you know sodas and other sugary drinks come with some not-so-sweet health risks? Drinking too much sugar has been linked to type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and tooth decay. Let's make healthier choices for a sweeter future!

#HealthyChoices #SugarAwareness #RethinkYourDrink #ReThinkYourDrink2024

¿Sabías que los refrescos y otras bebidas azucaradas vienen con algunos riesgos no tan dulces para la salud? Beber demasiada azúcar está asociado con la diabetes tipo 2, enfermedades cardíacas y caries dentales. ¡Elijamos opciones más saludables para un futuro más dulce! #OpcionesSaludables (or #DecisionesSaludables) #ConcienciaDelAzúcar #RethinkYourDrink #RethinkYourDrink2024



Partnerships



Andrea Pickett, MPH
Ariel Thomas-Urlik, MPH
Laurel Chambers, MPH
Lisa Steinman

Lauren Gritzer, DDS, MPH
Kristin Hoeft, MPH, PhD
Cristin Kearns, DDS, MBA, PhD
Christina Hect, PhD

Sloane Pagal
Amber Johnson



Che Casul



Bryan Albee

Guerneville Water Fountain Replacement

Goal: Install Filtered Water Refill Station by bus stop to increase community water consumption, decrease community consumption of sugary beverages, and reduce plastic bottle waste.



Wheaton Town Square Filtered Water Refill Station

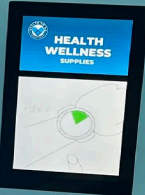


Filtered water refill station to be utilized by day laborers, bikers, market and concert visitors.



Sonoma County Zip Code Guide

Cloverdale/Geyserville	95441, 95425
Cotati/Penngrrove	94921, 94921
Healdsburg	95448
Petaluma	94952, 94954
Duhrert Park	94928
Russian River Area	95431, 95435, 95436, 95446, 95462, 95480
Santa Rosa	95401, 95401, 95404, 95406, 95407, 95408, 95439
Sonoma Valley	95442, 95476, 95462
Sebastopol-West County	95444, 95472, 95465, 94922, 94923
Windsor	95492
Live Outside Sonoma County	12345



FREE Supplies

PUSH

Recursos de salud gratuitos para llevar



HEALTH AND WELLNESS SUPPLIES

Recursos de salud gratuitos para llevar

PREVENT - PROMOTE - PROTECT
sonomacounty
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES

FREE Supplies

PUSH

Recursos de salud gratuitos para llevar

Thank You

