



**For Immediate Release**  
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## **New Telehealth Pilot Project Brings Dental Care to Underserved Children in Los Angeles County**

***“Virtual Dental Home” system launched to benefit low-income children enrolled in Los Angeles County’s Early Head Start and Head Start Programs***

**Los Angeles, Calif. (November 7, 2013)** –More than 450 dental visits have been provided to low-income and special needs children in Los Angeles County’s Early Head Start and Head Start programs associated with Santa Monica/Malibu Unified School District, Volunteers of America and Westside Children’s Center. Children enrolled in these programs now have a new way to receive dental screenings, assessments, and preventive services thanks First 5 LA’s one million dollar grant. The funding supports a new partnership and a groundbreaking telehealth pilot project called the “Virtual Dental Home,” which makes it possible for hundreds of children to get the dental care they need and to help spread the model to serve even more children.

The innovative oral health care delivery system was created by the Pacific Center for Special Care at University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry. Under the Virtual Dental Home model, specially trained dental hygienists in advanced practice, dental hygienists in public health settings and dental assistants provide dental care to underserved populations in a community setting, such as a school, community center, nursing home or group home. The hygienists and assistants virtually collaborate with a dentist using hand-held telehealth technology (hand-held x-ray devices) to provide critical dental services, assessment, and care.

Virtual Dental Home now benefits hundreds of children in Los Angeles County thanks to a collaborative effort between: First 5 LA, Westside Children’s Center, Santa Monica/Malibu Unified School District, Volunteers of America (which administers Head Start and Early Head Start and California toddler and preschool programs), Venice Family Clinic, The Children’s Partnership, the Pacific Center for Special Care, and 14 additional service sites throughout LA County. A successful sister pilot in San Mateo County has provided care through the Virtual Dental Home to almost 300 children. This partnership provides an opportunity for children enrolled in Early Head Start and Head Start programs to receive oral health screenings, risk assessment, and preventive treatment without having to visit a traditional dental clinic or office unless additional treatment is required. Case management is provided to support families in accessing more care if needed.

With parental consent, children are examined by a dental hygienist and assistant at the numerous Head Start and Early Head Start centers, like Westside Children’s Center, located throughout Los Angeles County. The dental records for these children are uploaded to a secure, cloud-based internet site where a dentist at Venice Family Clinic reviews them and recommends a treatment plan if further care is needed.

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The Virtual Dental Home system is currently in use at 14 Early Head Start and Head Start sites throughout Los Angeles County, and will be expanded to more sites this year, including Early Head Start infant and toddler sites, “I see so many children in the neighborhood with silver teeth,” said single-mother Hiliana Murillo whose two-year-old daughter Valentina is enrolled in Westside Children’s Center’s Early Head Start program. “This is not going to happen to my daughter.”

“Thanks to First 5 LA and partners like the University of the Pacific School of Dentistry, hundreds of children throughout the county will now have access to high-quality oral hygiene,” said Dr. Nicole Thompson-Marvel, Dental Director of Venice Family Clinic. “Studies have shown there is a relationship between dental care and self-esteem, school performance, and critical developmental health needs.”

According to Dr. Thompson-Marvel, more than 50 percent of children entering kindergarten have experienced tooth decay and roughly 25 percent of children on Medi-Cal get preventive dental services. This preschool, Medicaid-eligible population is targeted through the Virtual Dental Home project in several Head Start and Early Head Start centers in Los Angeles County.

“This new delivery model provides a much-needed community-based ‘virtual dental home’ for our state’s most vulnerable people, who will access dental services in their own communities as well as remove some of the barriers to receiving care in a traditional dental office setting,” said Dr. Paul Glassman, Project Director and Professor of Dental Practice at the University of the Pacific’s Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry.

“This is a smart and innovative way to get dental care to children who might otherwise go without it,” said Jenny Kattlove of The Children’s Partnership. “As more children qualify for dental benefits under health care reform, communities and states everywhere should be examining how new technologies like this can reach large numbers of children with the high quality dental care they need.”

### **About the Pacific Center for Special Care at the University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry**

The Pacific Center for Special Care is an organization within the Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry committed to improving the oral health of underserved people on the local, state and federal level. The Center has created best-practice models of, and advocates for, improved access to dental care for anyone who faces challenges receiving oral health services through the traditional oral health care system. This includes groups and individuals who have difficulty maintaining good oral health or accessing oral health services because of medical, physical, social, economic and geographic conditions. Virtual Dental Home has been implemented with various underserved communities throughout California since 2010. To learn more, visit: [www.virtualdentalhome.org](http://www.virtualdentalhome.org).

### **About Westside Children’s Center**

At Westside Children’s Center (WCC), we are committed to breaking the cycles of intergenerational poverty, abuse, and neglect by creating a level playing field -- supporting each child’s physical, cognitive and social-emotional development and preparing them for a life of learning. Regardless of economics or family circumstances, we reinforce in children the tools they will need to succeed in life (curiosity, optimism, self-control, resilience, and perseverance). When hardship or crisis poses a threat, WCC provides wide-ranging services designed to build a foundation for both short-term and lifelong success. Our child-centered, family-focused approach embraces those at-risk with a comprehensive, fully-integrated support system involving: high-quality early education; services that improve parents’ ability to attach to and care for their children (i.e. mental health support, substance abuse treatment, parenting classes, etc.); and foster and adoption services. Our highly-trained team ensures that each child receives the tailored supports that she and her family need to be prepared for success in school and beyond. For more information, please visit [www.westsidechildren.org](http://www.westsidechildren.org).

**About Venice Family Clinic**

Venice Family Clinic provides quality health care to people in need. With eight clinical sites in Venice, Santa Monica, Mar Vista, Inglewood and Culver City, Venice Family Clinic is the medical home for thousands of low-income and uninsured families across Los Angeles. In 2012, with the support of donors and over 2,000 volunteers, including 500 physicians, Venice Family Clinic, a non-profit 501 (c) (3) organization, provided quality medical, dental, mental health, vision and specialty care to more than 24,000 men, women and children with nowhere else to turn.

**About First 5 Los Angeles County**

First 5 LA oversees the L.A. County allocation of funds from Proposition 10, which added a 50-cent tax on tobacco products sold in California. Funds raised help pay for health care, education and child development programs for children from the prenatal stage to age five and their families. First 5 LA's mission is to increase the number of young children who are physically and emotionally healthy, safe, and ready to learn. For more information, please visit [www.first5la.org](http://www.first5la.org).

**About The Children's Partnership**

The Children's Partnership (TCP) is a national, nonprofit organization working to ensure that all children, especially those at risk of being left behind, have the opportunities and resources they need to grow up healthy and to lead productive lives. The Children's Partnership works to: assure that all children have health coverage and access to quality health and dental care; ensure that all children can benefit from the opportunities afforded by computing devices and the Internet; and advances effective use of technology to improve health and health care systems for children, including those in foster care. TCP has offices in Santa Monica, CA; Sacramento, CA; and Washington, DC.

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