

**Public Health
Department**
Alameda County Health

**THE OFFICE OF DENTAL HEALTH
STRATEGIC PLAN
2025-2030**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

Oral health is a cornerstone of overall health and well-being for people of all ages. Oral health impacts eating and speaking, school achievement, and employment. Tooth decay is the most common chronic condition for children, and one of the leading causes of school absenteeism, yet it is preventable.

The road to improved oral health in Alameda County is both an inspirational and a challenging story. Since the last strategic plan was adopted in 2019, we have made tremendous strides to improve oral health accessibility, particularly for low-income residents, improve integration of oral health into overall healthcare, and develop new funding streams to support this work.

As this current plan is being adopted, we are acutely aware of new challenges, including cuts to Medi-Cal and other funding sources and immigration policies, that may make dental services more challenging to access by our County’s most vulnerable populations.

Despite this, we have the experience and determination to overcome these obstacles and achieve our vision of optimal oral health for all Alameda County residents. Bringing together dozens of organizations and institutions, we as the collective will continue to serve our community with the belief that oral health is a key to overall health and a basic human right.

PROGRESS IN ALAMEDA COUNTY ORAL HEALTH: AT A GLANCE

Since the inception of our last strategic plan in 2019, we have influenced the environment and transformed oral health policies and practices throughout the County and across the State. For example:

- We developed a dental care coordinator workforce, resembling the Community Health Worker model (CHW), that successfully scheduled tens of thousands of appointments for children, half of whom had previously never been to the dentist. This contributed to a statewide policy change that helped formalize the value of CHW, now a reimbursable benefit under Medi-Cal.
- We initiated a vibrant Community of Practice continuing education program, dedicated to serving the most vulnerable and encouraging partnerships with the practicing dental community.
- We built a strong alliance among clinics and the public health department to serve the hardest to

- reach populations and the most vulnerable families.
- We pioneered a collaboration with perinatal services programs to yield increased utilization of dental services by pregnant and post-partum people.
- We joined Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment, the statewide initiative developing school-based and school-linked services, and program sustainability.
- We institutionalized the Oral Health Committee of the Alameda County Public Health Commission, which created a strong voice for oral health among policymakers as a key component of overall health.

Building on these successes, this Strategic Plan proposes ways to strengthen our efforts to reduce oral health disparities and bring greater accessibility to all our county residents.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Despite these significant achievements, much work remains to be done. Our recent comprehensive needs assessment findings continue to highlight persistent disparities in oral health outcomes and access to care, particularly for children, youth, certain racial and ethnic groups, and specific geographic areas. Ongoing challenges, including high rates of dental disease, low utilization of dental services among Medi-Cal beneficiaries, frequent emergency room visits for dental issues, and a lack of diversity among dental providers, underscore the critical need to further expand resources, tailor program efforts, and advance systemic strategies to promote oral health equity for all.

Our Vision: All Alameda County residents have optimal oral health throughout their life course.

Our process: To achieve our vision and address the oral health disparities among our county’s residents, the Alameda County Office of Dental Health (ODH) convened a steering committee and held two large in-person community meetings that involved more than 100 community partners to create this Alameda County Oral Health Strategic Plan 2025-

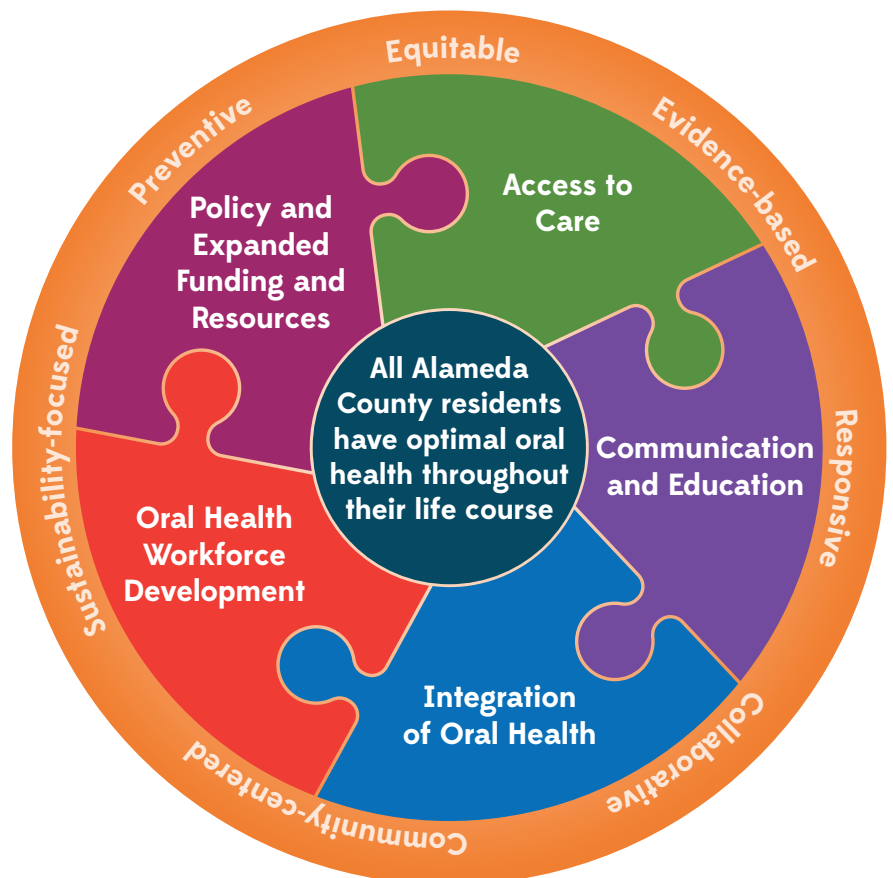
THE ROAD FORWARD: FOCUS AREAS, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The following focus areas, goals and strategies are the pillars for the efforts to improve health equity, with a focus on oral health, throughout the County in the next five years. The goals and strategies were developed based on the needs assessment findings and learning from past successes and challenges. All focus areas generally align with the Alameda County Community Health Improvement (CHIP), 2023-2025, priorities that promote better health outcomes for the County residents.

2030. This plan aligns with the California Oral Health Plan 2018-2028 and is a blueprint to expand and strengthen current efforts while continuing to develop new and innovative approaches addressing identified barriers to oral health.

Priority Populations: The Steering Committee selected the following priority populations based on a thorough analysis of data on prevalence of oral health problems and utilization of services, as well as our guiding principles.

- » Children 0 to 20 years old, with a focus on 0-5 years old and elementary school children
- » Pregnant and post-partum people
- » Older adults
- » Children and their families experiencing homelessness
- » Children and youth with special health care needs
- » Communities experiencing significant disparities, including communities of color and low-income groups.



ACCESS TO CARE

To minimize barriers to preventive health services and treatment, we will prioritize offering services at sites where priority populations already congregate, in partnership with diverse organizations. In alignment with the California State Oral Health Plan, we will focus on expanding school-based and school-linked programs and increasing participation in the Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA).

Building on successful programs with organizations serving prenatal individuals and children 0-5, we propose expanding to new partners, enhancing coordination, and securing additional resources. Care coordination, a proven linchpin in supporting individuals in accessing care, will be expanded and integrated into a greater range of agencies serving all ages.

GOAL: To improve the availability and utilization of oral health services for priority populations.

STRATEGY 1	Improve and expand dental care coordination, integrating it into new and existing programs.
STRATEGY 2	Improve awareness, access, and dental care utilization for prenatal individuals and children aged 0–5.
STRATEGY 3	Enhance and expand school-based/school-linked (SB/SL) dental services.
STRATEGY 4	Increase awareness of and participation in the KOHA mandate through collaboration with key stakeholders.

COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

Public health messages are most effective when delivered by trusted messengers and in culturally and linguistically responsive ways.

The Office of Dental Health will work closely with a range of partner agencies who serve priority populations to develop and communicate impactful messaging, while training and supporting their staff regarding effective oral health practices. A network of oral health champions will be created to deliver messaging about oral health practices and resources.

GOAL: To prioritize population-level communication, increasing oral health literacy and supporting healthy behaviors in communities populations.

STRATEGY 1	Update and disseminate the Office of Dental Health’s 2-year communication plan, aligned with the oral health strategic plan 2025-2030.
STRATEGY 2	Empower and engage partners to better serve their community as it relates to oral health.

INTEGRATION OF ORAL HEALTH IN MEDICAL CARE AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Oral health is integral to overall health, yet oral health services are often separated from primary care and other services. In the next five years, integration of oral health services and education will be expanded and further institutionalized by training non-dental pre-natal, primary care, and early childhood professionals; providing services by dental and non-dental providers at locations where priority populations frequent and further integrating oral health into other public health programs.

GOAL: To integrate oral health assessment, education, prevention, and referral into primary care and social service programs

STRATEGY 1

Integrate Oral Health into Prenatal Care and Early Childhood Programs.

STRATEGY 2

Integrate Oral Health into Pediatric Primary Care and Family Practices.

STRATEGY 3

Integrate Oral Health into other public health programs.

ORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In Alameda County, as throughout California, oral health outcomes vary widely among people of different races, cultures, and income levels. A key component to narrowing inequities in oral health is to increase the number of oral health professionals who reflect the populations served. To accomplish this, we will explore innovative practices with proven effectiveness to train, recruit, and retain a diversity of oral health professionals in addition to training all staff to have greater understanding of and sensitivity to people of different cultures and backgrounds.

GOAL: To increase the diversity of the oral health workforce, enhance cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and strengthen its capacity to better serve the priority populations

STRATEGY 1

Expand and diversify the Medi-Cal Dental providers network and their staff.

STRATEGY 2

Enhance community dental care coordination to enhance the quality and comprehensiveness of community services and programs as they relate to oral health, utilizing CalAIM, the community health worker benefit, and related strategies.

STRATEGY 3

Create employment opportunities through career pathway programs and training opportunities, specifically prioritizing a diverse workforce and supporting equity in economic security.

Care coordination will be expanded, as this model has proven to be effective in supporting priority populations to access services and education. In addition, these CHW roles can provide an important pipeline or on-ramp into professional dental and public health career pathways.

POLICY AND EXPANDED FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Policies and funding that support oral health have expanded over the past five years, thanks to a strong sustained effort among a variety of stakeholders throughout the County and the State. To achieve sustainability and increased effectiveness, these policies must be implemented and greater resources identified. In this Strategic Plan, a countywide policy agenda and sustainability plan will be developed, disseminated and advocated to achieve the goals of this plan.

GOAL: To advance innovative policies and expand funding that will support and sustain the Alameda County Oral Health Strategic Plan goals.

STRATEGY 1

Develop and advocate for policies and funding that strengthen county-wide dental care coordination.

STRATEGY 2

Align with statewide policies and initiatives, particularly the KOHA mandate, to improve dental access for the priority population.

STRATEGY 3

Analyze and implement policies and funding to ensure the expansion of the oral health workforce and improve culturally responsive access for priority populations.

STRATEGY 4

Create and advocate for policies and funding that advance and prioritize county and state-wide oral health initiatives.

EVALUATION AND SURVEILLANCE

Evaluation and surveillance are integral to the ongoing implementation of this strategic plan to ensure that our resources are allocated carefully and effectively for the greatest impact, while testing innovative approaches. An evaluation plan has been developed, including a list of indicators and performance measures to track and communicate progress in addressing the issues identified in the needs assessment.

CONCLUSION

This strategic plan builds on our collective experience and evidence-based practices, as well as new, innovative strategies to address the issues identified in the needs assessment. As external circumstances are changing as we write this plan, flexibility and resilience will be critical to achieve optimal oral health for all residents in Alameda County. Building on the successes and robust county-wide collaborations over more than a decade, we are confident in our ability to overcome today's obstacles to achieve greater oral health for all of Alameda County's residents, regardless of race, geography, income, ability, age and other factors.



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