

# Primary Care Providers: A Potential Solution to a Hidden Epidemic

## GETTING THE ANSWERS

Three methods were used to collect information about the key questions:

- Surveys with caretakers
- Surveys with primary care providers
- Interviews with oral health experts in the county



## WHAT WAS UNCOVERED

### THE POSITIVES

The data collected in Contra Costa County reinforced that primary care providers can play a crucial role filling the gap in oral health care access for young children in the county, by reaching children who otherwise would not be reached.

*100% of caretakers said that they were comfortable getting oral health services and information for their children in a primary care setting.*

### THE CHALLENGES

Oral health is not a priority for many primary care providers in Contra Costa County.

*"For physicians there is still a disconnect between the mouth and the body." - Key Informant*

Many primary care providers in Contra Costa County do not have the training and tools they need to make this a reality.

*"For medical offices, especially smaller ones, to make a big change, they need outside help. But that costs money, time, etc. and that's why it's not happening." - Key Informant*

## NEXT STEPS

Incorporating preventive oral health services in primary care settings will not be effective unless larger issues are addressed.

Although this community assessment focused on Contra Costa County, the following recommendations are applicable across the state of California.

- Create infrastructural changes that facilitate the integration of oral health in primary care settings
- Improve access to dental care to low income children under three
- Increase overall oral health awareness for caretakers and policymakers
- Expand current efforts to provide oral health information and services in non-traditional settings
- Improve overall oral health education of primary care providers

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- 1: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2000). Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General.
- 2: Contra Costa County Health Services (2007). Healthy Teeth for Life: The Oral Health of Children in Contra Costa County.
- 3: Images in Community Brief: [www.creativecommons.org](http://www.creativecommons.org)