



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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FIRST 5 COMMISSIONS BRING ORAL HEALTH CARE TO CHILDREN IN RURAL AREAS

Mobile Dental Unit provides free dental services in Butte, Glenn and Tehama counties

(Chico) – A “floss-cutting” ceremony today launched the new regional Mobile Dental Unit, a traveling dental facility that will offer oral health care to all children in the area with limited access to services. As families face financial hardship in the economic downturn, First 5 commissions in Butte, Tehama and Glenn counties have partnered to fund this much-needed resource for children up to age 5.

“Unfortunately, in tough times, the importance of children’s oral health may be overlooked,” said Maureen Kirk, Butte County Supervisor and First 5 Butte County Children and Families Commissioner. “With this Mobile Dental Unit, we’re providing help to children whose families can’t afford regular care.”

With a collaborative \$375,000 grant from the three First 5 commissions, Northern Valley Indian Health developed the Mobile Dental Unit, which will visit kindergartens, preschools, family resource centers and community events throughout the three counties in 2009.

Staffed by certified dentists and dental hygienists, the 40-foot Mobile Dental Unit provides a full range of dental care – from teeth cleanings to root canals. According to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, nearly one-third of all children in the tri-county area did not have a dental exam in the past year. Across California, research has found that more than half of children attending kindergarten have some form of tooth decay.

“Too often, children’s oral health is not recognized or treated as an important part of their overall health,” said Dr. Melvin Sage, dental director of Northern Valley Indian Health. “But tooth decay and infections can cause children to miss school, limit their ability to focus in the classroom and impair their speech development.”

The Mobile Dental Unit’s county schedule for the first quarter of 2009 is as follows:

- **Butte:** January 5-9, 12-15, 20-23
- **Tehama:** January 26-30; February 2-6, 9-13
- **Glenn:** March 2-6, 9-13, 16-20

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Representatives who joined Dr. Sage for tours of the MDU at this morning's event included Maureen Kirk, Butte County Supervisor and First 5 Butte County Children and Families Commissioner; Jill Blake, First 5 Butte County Children and Families Commission Director; Mildred Johnstone, First 5 Tehama County Children and Families Commissioner; Denise Snider, First 5 Tehama County Children and Families Commission Executive Director; Joy Amaro, First 5 Glenn County Executive Director; Marlena Sparks, Gridley City Council; Greg Marks, on behalf of Assemblyman Dan Logue; Steve Riggio, D.D.S., Area Dental Consultant, California Area Indian Health Service; and Lalani Ratnayake, D.D.S., Dental Support Center Coordinator, California Indian Health Board.

For more information about the Mobile Dental Unit and its schedule, please contact Northern Valley Indian Health at (530) 896-9400.

About First 5

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child's growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to support programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. First 5 county commissions distribute Prop. 10 revenues to programs and services that meet local needs.

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