

For Immediate Release

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For More Information

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**Washington Dental Service Donates \$1 million to Bring Healthy Smiles to
Low Income Children in King County**

11,000 – 13,000 children to get oral health care coverage through King County program

(Seattle, WA) – Uninsured children in King County will have better access to dental care thanks to a \$1 million grant from the Washington Dental Service to King County. The grant was announced today by King County Executive Ron Sims and Washington Dental Service Chief Executive Officer Jim Dwyer.

A state survey conducted in 2005 found that the rate of tooth decay among Washington children is growing with one in five elementary school-aged children having rampant untreated decay – cavities in 7 or more teeth. The problem recently made national headlines with adolescent deaths in Maryland and Louisiana stemming from common, preventable cavities

Children with severe dental decay often need to be treated in a hospital emergency and operating rooms, costing about \$4,000 per child. Extensive dental decay is one of the top five reasons children receive care in the operating rooms of Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center.

King County will use the donation to expand oral health care to 11,000 – 13,000 children as part of its Children's Health Initiative to bring health care coverage and services to uninsured low-income children whose families may qualify for existing public health insurance programs or the newly expanded coverage, effective 2009, under the new children's health act.

"Washington Dental Service stepped up in a big way to help bring desperately needed dental care to thousands of children across King County," said Sims. "This generous donation will ensure our most vulnerable children receive high quality medical and oral health care – you need both to have good overall health."

The Washington Dental Service donation also sets up a challenge for King County to secure additional donations from other public or private community partners to fully fund the program.

"Our community is in the midst of an oral health crisis, and our young children are bearing the brunt of it," said Washington Dental Service CEO Jim Dwyer. "Washington Dental Service is committed to being part of the solution. We believe every child should have a chance to learn, play and grow up in good health."

The oral health initiative is a key action identified by King County's Children's Health Access Task Force as needed to fill gaps in health care system that leave thousands of low income children in King County without health insurance.

"There is no disease as widespread as childhood cavities, and the shame is they are nearly preventable for minimal cost," said Sims. "A child whose mouth is hurting can't eat or sleep properly, has difficulty paying attention in school, and is at risk of further health problems."

The Washington Dental Service grant is the second \$1 million award to King County's Children's Health Initiative. Group Health Cooperative gave \$1 million late last year to help pay for health care of uninsured children.

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