



# California

## Expanding People's Access to Fluoridated Water to Prevent Dental Decay

### Public Health Problem

More than half of all school-aged children in California have untreated tooth decay. The percentage of California children aged 6–8 years with untreated decay is more than twice as high as the national average. More than 1 of every 5 of California 10th graders urgently need dental care for extensive decay, pain, or infection. Dental decay is a problem that starts at an early age: almost one-third of California preschoolers and more than two-thirds of elementary and high schoolchildren have experienced dental decay. Just 3 years ago, with only 17% of its water fluoridated, California ranked 48th among the states in the percentage of its residents having access to fluoridated drinking water. Almost 1 billion dollars is spent annually in the federal Medicaid dental program, known as Denti-Cal, to restore teeth due to decay in children and adults.

### Program Example

The California Fluoridation Implementation Project is administered by the California Department of Health Services. The program provides consultation and technical assistance to communities interested in fluoridating their drinking water and includes a public-private partnership to help communities obtain funds for these efforts. Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant funds were used as leverage to obtain \$15 million dollars in funding from the California Endowment to carry out this program. Program goals are to improve youths' access to dental care and preventive dental programs, promote statewide fluoridation efforts, and strengthen the public sector's capacity to fluoridate water supplies. The program has been instrumental in fluoridating water in Los Angeles, Sacramento, Mountain View, and Pico Rivera. Program staff have worked with the second largest water wholesaler in California, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, to provide fluoridated water to an additional 400,000 people. In addition, the largest private water wholesaler in the United States, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, voted to fluoridate its 5 treatment plants, thus providing fluoridated water to an additional 18 million Californians.

### Implications and Impact

Given this program's success, the percentage of Californians with access to fluoridated drinking water is projected to increase from 17% (6 million residents) to an estimated 66% (23 million residents) by early 2006. These fluoridation efforts will move California from 48th in the nation to the top third and will bring the state closer to the *Healthy People 2010* goal of 75% of Californians having access to fluoridated drinking water.

### Contact Information

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