**Press Release**

**For Immediate Release:**  August 10, 2021

**Contact:**  Sheree Storm, [sstorm@dientes.org](mailto:sstorm@dientes.org), 831-600-8256

**Dientes Provides Over $31,000 in Free Dental Care to Local Seniors**

**& Encourages Advocacy to add Dental Services to Medicare**

(Santa Cruz, CA) On Saturday, August 7th Dientes celebrated seniors in our community with a day of free dental care at their main clinic on Commercial Way in Santa Cruz. Give Seniors a Smile Day, an annual event for low-income, uninsured senior patients, was put on hold last year due to COVID. This year, with safety protocols in place, Dientes was able to serve 69 seniors and provide $31,337 in free oral health services.

Smiles were abundant and patients were eager to share their gratitude for Dientes’ staff, who created a fun seventies theme for the day, with classic tunes and brightly colored decorations. Laura Lee, a senior who helps care for both her son with Parkinson’s disease and dementia and his epileptic daughter, says everything has been so much harder since COVID began. *“You have no idea how much I have been fighting for my family. You’ve got to push so much. So, to get a call from Dientes asking me to come in on Saturday to get my teeth cleaned for free – that was just unbelievable. The young man who worked on my teeth was delightful. I thought, gosh did I go to heaven and not know it?”*

Laura Lee had previously visited Dientes in June when she lost a large filling and was having trouble chewing. *“It was bad, but Dientes fit me in and I was so elated. Getting that taken of was one less problem in life. And, I could eat again.”*

Dientes also launched advocacy efforts for seniors on this day. Dientes CEO Laura Marcus commented, *“There is a systemic problem with Medicare. It doesn’t include coverage for dental services, which is both costly and can have serious health implications. Give Seniors a Smile Day is important to meet the needs of our local seniors, but we need to let our representatives know that Medicare needs to be fixed.”*

Hopefully, change is on the way. If passed, the Medicare Dental Benefit Act of 2021: H.R. 502 and S. 97, introduced into Congress on January 28, 2021, would:

* Add oral health coverage to Medicare Part B, treating the coverage of oral health services the very same way as other health services in the Medicare program.
* Offer sufficiently comprehensive oral health coverage, including dentures, and ensure that Medicare will reimburse for these services the same way it does for other health services.
* Support access to care for low-income Medicare enrollees to ensure adequate reimbursement for dental providers who serve low-income enrollees.

For more information and to help support the Medicare Dental Benefit Act of 2021:  dientes.org/seniors

#     #     #

*Photos:  Dientes patient Laura Lee is happy to receive free care on Give Seniors A Smile Day 2021 080721*

*Dientes Community Dental Care’s mission is to create lasting oral health for the underserved children and adults in Santa Cruz County and neighboring communities. 96% of Dientes’ patients live at or below the poverty level. Dientes accepts Medi-Cal and offers sliding scale fees for uninsured patients.*