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CONTACT: Dawn Wells
Phone: (310) 552-4107

PARENTS LEARN IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S EARLY YEARS
Use of First 5 California Programs on the Rise

(Sacramento) – A recent multi-year “Statewide Evaluation Data and Findings” report from First 5 California shows more and more parents are accessing First 5 California programs to help ensure their children enter school healthy and learning. Considering the scope and reach of First 5 California’s programs, families are benefiting from parent education and health access to school readiness programs and special needs assessments.

Between the fiscal years of 2002 and 2005, the number of times families have used First 5 California-funded services – including everything from screening for children’s disabilities and other special needs to enrolling families in health insurance – has more than tripled, growing from more than one million to more than 3.5 million.

“Our programs increasing in breadth and depth is promising, but California’s children are much more than numbers and outcomes; they are the state’s most precious resource,” said Kris Perry, executive director of First 5 California. “We are helping to improve the trajectory of children’s lives – and that is good for them, their families, and our state.”

The data collected by SRI International reveals sizable strides made since

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2002-03 in the area of children's health insurance. In an effort to ensure California children grow up healthy, the number of times First 5 California offered health insurance enrollment assistance went from more than 200,000 to nearly 500,000.

"When a child receives immunizations, treatment for chronic illnesses, and regular check-ups, First 5 California is helping that child improve his or her chances at having a healthy and productive life," said Perry.

Through another recent study, First 5 California identified a looming child care crisis for the state – with nearly a quarter of child care providers approaching retirement now. To begin addressing issues of low salaries, high turnover rate, and an aging workforce of early care and education providers, First 5 California has granted more than 150,000 early child care subsidies or vouchers for provider professional development and training programs.

In the past three years, First 5 California has served nearly two million young children and their family members through school readiness programs. Research shows access to these programs helps children develop the critical skills needed to enter school ready to learn.¹

"We're glad parents are realizing the importance of the early years and that they can make smart choices that will help their children reach their potential," said Hector Ramirez, chair of First 5 California. "Providing more than two million additional instances of service in just three years shows our programs are serving the needs of parents and caregivers in helping their children succeed."

The study also confirmed First 5 California programs are reaching the State's

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¹ Editor's Note: For additional findings, reference the following chart, "By the Numbers - A Closer Look at First 5 California's Success"

ethnically diverse population. For example, Latinos make up 65 percent of those served. This reach is consistent with the fact that approximately 50 percent of children born in California are of Latino descent.

The multi-year "Statewide Evaluation Data & Findings" report on 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05 respectively, tracks a wide range of data to reveal how California children and their families are benefiting from First 5 California programs.

First 5 California is continuing to track participants, activities and outcomes during 2005-06.

By the Numbers – A Closer Look at First 5 California's Success			
A sampling of additional results include:			
Objective	2002-05 Services Provided	Increase in amount of services provided in 2004-05 compared to 2002-03	First 5 Activities and Supports
Increased Participation in High-Quality Early Education/Preschools	2,120,546	634,025	Early education program enrollment
Improved Oral Health	882,338	185,995	Oral health treatment, screening and prevention activities
Improved Child Health and Nutrition	821,731	195,874	Breastfeeding assistance
Increased Parent Education to Support Children's Healthy Development	898,517	95,801	Prenatal care and birth education
Improved Early Literacy	1,241,491	276,406	Family literacy programs
Increased Child Safety	1,265,650	288,990	Safety education and injury/violence prevention resources
Fewer Smoking-Related Illnesses in Children	526,217	84,566	Tobacco cessation education and treatment
Increased Child Safety	324,176	51,315	Car seat distribution

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ABOUT FIRST 5 CALIFORNIA

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, First 5 California, also known as the California Children and Families Commission, was established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, child care and other programs for expectant parents and children up to age 5. For more information on First 5 California, visit www.first5california.com.

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