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## **INNOVATIVE ORANGE COUNTY PROGRAM HONORED FOR ADDRESSING GROWING SHORTAGE OF SCHOOL NURSES**

*Children and Families Commission of Orange County Receives Award for Program Aimed at Helping Youngest Children*

**IRVINE, Calif. – (February 3, 2005)** – An innovative program designed to address the critical shortage of school nurses in Orange County – reflective of a growing national problem – has been given the California School Nurses Organization’s top award. The Children and Families Commission of Orange County received the Lyda Smiley Award for its School Readiness Nurse Program, which funds school nurses who are trained to provide healthcare, immunization and other related services to preschool children ages five and under in each of the county’s 25 school districts.

“The need for school nurses in Orange County is overwhelming. Currently, there approximately 2,870 students to each school nurse in the county, which is nearly four times higher than the nationally recommended ratio of 750 to one,” said Julie Poulson, chairperson of the Children and Families Commission. “Our program enables the county’s school districts to recruit, fund and train up to 27 new school nurses, who work with district preschool and school readiness programs to help ensure children under five years old are healthy and ready for school.”

The Commission established the School Readiness Nurse Program in 2004 to fund school nurses, provide ongoing technical assistance and training for nurses and offer recruitment services to Orange County school districts. The program is also supported by funding from the Commission

for the development of a School Nurse Credential Program at California State University at Fullerton.

The School Readiness Nurse Program in Orange County funds an average of one full-time nurse for each of the county's 25 school districts – 27 new nurses in all. Depending on its size, each school district receives either one or two fulltime nurses, or one half-time nurse, who work in collaboration with other school readiness programs to provide children ages five and under with such health-related services as health screenings, immunizations and parent education.

“In all of Orange County, there are currently only about 180 school nurses to serve the more than half-million children attending school,” said Michael Ruane, executive director for the Commission. “There was a clear need to address this growing problem as more children are born here and more families immigrate here. The O.C. we live and work in, unlike the television show, is ethnically and economically diverse and requires innovative approaches to providing and promoting healthcare for the youngest in our communities.”

“The severe lack of school nurses in Orange County is reflective of a growing shortage of school nurses nationwide,” said Sandy Landry, past president of the School Nurse Section of the American School Health Association and the 2004 recipient for outstanding achievement in school health award. “In many instances, state budget cutbacks have forced cash-strapped school districts to eliminate school nurse positions, leaving many schools with either no nurse available or only one nurse who rotates among many schools.”

Although the U.S. Public Health Service has set a national goal of one nurse for every 750 school children, nearly half of all U.S. schools fall short of that recommended ratio, according to the National School Nurses Association. In fact, the Association found there was one school nurse for every 3,521 students in the nation's schools in 2003.

The Lyda Smiley Award is presented annually to a person or group not actively engaged in school nursing who has made significant contributions to the practice of school nursing and/or school health.

The Children and Families Commission of Orange County was created as a result of Proposition 10, the California Children and Families Act of 1998. The proposition added a 50-cent sales tax on tobacco products sold in California and requires that funds raised be used to support education, health and childcare programs promoting healthy early childhood development from the prenatal stage to age five. The Children and Families Commission of Orange County is responsible for overseeing the allocation of tobacco tax revenues received annually from the State Commission. For more information, please visit the Commission's website at [www.occhildrenandfamilies.com](http://www.occhildrenandfamilies.com).

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