



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**The Iditarod and Kjell Inge Røkke introduce IditaHealth’s  
“Smiles for Miles,” bringing preventive pediatric dental care to rural trail communities**

**Wasilla, Alaska** — The Iditarod Trail Committee on Tuesday announced the launch of IditaHealth: Smiles for Miles, a community-driven pediatric dental wellness initiative that will deliver preventive care, oral health education and hygiene supplies to elementary schoolchildren in rural Iditarod checkpoint communities.

Smiles for Miles will begin alongside the 2026 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race and is designed as a sustainable, long-term program organized by the Iditarod Trail Committee in partnership with long-time Iditarod volunteers, local community leadership and Tribal Health partners. The program is made possible thanks to a significant donation from the race’s first Expedition Musher, Norwegian businessman and philanthropist Kjell Inge Røkke.

“Smiles for Miles is one way to show appreciation to Iditarod trail communities that have supported the race for generations, ” said Inge Røkke. “It’s my hope that this program can deliver meaningful health benefits in return, helping to ensure that every child along the trail will grow up healthy and pain-free.”

The initiative’s first phase consists of planning, volunteer recruitment, supply delivery and coordination throughout 2026 to support a series of fall community dental clinics in rural trail communities. The clinics will provide screenings and dental sealants that help prevent cavities, along with oral health education and hygiene kits including toothbrushes and fluoride toothpaste.

Smiles for Miles supports the State of Alaska’s Healthy Alaskans 2030 goals by expanding access to preventive services such as sealants, which can reduce cavities by up to 80%. Dental decay remains among the most common and preventable childhood health challenges, particularly in rural areas where access to care can be limited.

Program director Dr. Jodie Guest, professor and senior vice chair in the Department of Epidemiology at the Rollins School of Public Health, has volunteered with the Iditarod for nearly two decades.

“I am incredibly excited to help launch Smiles for Miles, an initiative designed to help ensure that every child in Alaska has access to dental sealants,” Guest said. “This program represents what matters most — meeting communities where they are, strengthening health equity and supporting the well-being of Alaska’s children for generations to come.”

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### **About the Iditarod's New Expedition Musher Category**

The Expedition Mushing Class allows participants to travel the official Iditarod Trail and cross the ceremonial finish line in Nome — while operating under a different structure than the competitive race teams. They are not included in the official race standings and are not eligible for prize winnings. Expedition Musher's are not subject to the competitive race rules; however, they must adhere to exemplary dog care standards at all times, are required to strictly avoid interfering in any way with the competitive field and will be under the jurisdiction of race officials. Upon successful completion, Expedition Musher's receive a special edition of the iconic Finisher's Belt Buckle in recognition of their journey. The competitive race remains unchanged; the Expedition Class is a clearly defined, non-competitive category that preserves the integrity of the Iditarod while offering an alternative way to travel the historic trail.

### **About the Iditarod**

The Iditarod Trail Committee is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to preserve the rich tradition of the Alaska sled dog and the Iditarod Trail. The organization is charged with coordinating the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, an annual long-distance sled dog race stretching from Anchorage to Nome for nearly a 1,000-mile journey through Alaska over the roughest, most breathtaking terrain in the world. For more information, visit [www.iditarod.com](http://www.iditarod.com).

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