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Media Release

First Nations Oral Health: How Dental Hygienists Can Help

September 28, 2012 (Ottawa, ON) — The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) congratulates Health Canada and the First Nations Governance Information Centre on the release of the [First Nations Regional Health Survey](#). The survey identifies several priority health issues for First Nations communities including:

- 40% have persistent oral pain.
- 55% brush teeth daily compared to 74% of non-Aboriginal Canadians.
- 23% have untreated root caries compared to 7% of non-Aboriginal Canadians.
- 44.7% have calculus (tartar) compared to 10.7% of non-Aboriginal Canadians.
- 39% have no access to oral health care.

This critical survey will help in identifying innovative changes for First Nations communities. Health Canada's, First Nations Inuit Health Branch, Non-Insured Health Benefits have a transformative new project in Alberta and Ontario providing First Nations with direct access to dental hygienists. It means that dental hygienists practice outside of a traditional dental office providing services in First Nations communities and with a range of other health professionals. These projects increase access to care, as they enable dental hygienists to go into rural and remote communities and provide services in long term care facilities, with portable dental hygiene equipment.

Oral health is essential for overall wellness and it is an integral part of physical, social, and mental wellbeing. Dental hygienists' oral health wellness approach is cost effective, as it increases the success of client self management and helps to prevent dental diseases which are costly to treat. CDHA's past president, Arlynn Brodie indicates, "dental hygienists see firsthand the negative consequences of poor oral health. Oral disease prevention means fewer children will need costly dental disease treatment in hospitals and reduced time lost from school, which is reported by almost one quarter of children. Dental hygienists are committed, ready and willing to providing services to high need populations. CDHA encourages the other provincial FNIHB programs to adopt these successful projects in other First Nations communities. "

CDHA and dental hygienists across Canada look forward to assisting and supporting First Nations communities and Health Canada in improving First Nations oral health. Serving the profession since 1963, CDHA is the collective national voice of more than 24,000 registered dental hygienists working in Canada, directly representing 16,500 individual members including dental hygienists and students. Dental hygiene is the 6th largest registered health profession in Canada with professionals working in a variety of settings, including independent practice, with people of all ages, addressing issues related to oral health. For more information on oral health, visit: www.cdha.ca

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