



THE CANADIAN DENTAL  
HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION  
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE  
DES HYGIÉNISTES DENTAIRE

# CDHA Advocacy Toolkit



Helping to ensure optimal oral and  
overall health for all Canadians

# CDHA Advocacy Toolkit

It is important to ensure that politicians at all levels and of all political stripes understand the vital role dental hygienists play in helping to ensure optimal oral and overall health for Canadians. While the staff and board of directors of the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) meet regularly with elected officials and maintain ongoing relationships with civil servants, successful advocacy depends heavily on local efforts by members to deliver a strong message to their elected representatives on issues affecting their community. To prepare dental hygienists for this advocacy work, CDHA has developed a toolkit with the information required to ensure that discussions with local elected officials succeed in raising awareness of the importance of access to preventive and therapeutic oral health care for Canadians.

## Steps for Successful Advocacy

### 1 Arrange a Meeting

Arrange a meeting with local representatives to talk about the importance of preventive oral health care and the critical role of dental hygienists. This 15- to 30-minute meeting could also focus on a particular topic that you're concerned about within your community or province, such as cannabis legislation, community water fluoridation or oral care of seniors. Use the letter template to request a meeting, ideally within three weeks of the date on which you send the letter (Appendix A). Obtain contact and background information on the representative by visiting their website.

Once you have sent the letter, call the office after a few days to follow-up on the meeting invitation, explaining that you are a constituent and that you hope to meet in person at the representative's next available opportunity to discuss oral health concerns in the community. When engaging politicians, it is important to remember that members of Parliament and provincial politicians often have daunting schedules, but tend to make more time for people from the ridings they represent.

### 2 Prepare for the Meeting

When preparing for a meeting it is important to do your homework. You should always review background information about the elected official you are connecting with beforehand. Biographical information for federal officials is available online at <https://openparliament.ca/politicians>. In addition, you can contact Paula Benbow, manager of health policy, at [pbenbow@cdha.ca](mailto:pbenbow@cdha.ca) or 1-800-267-5235 ext. 123 for help in locating the information you need to succeed.

It is important that dental hygienists across Canada speak with one voice and deliver consistent messages to elected officials. The overarching message that needs to be conveyed is that investments in preventive oral care are more effective, both financially and clinically, than delivering oral care after disease and other problems arise. You are encouraged to consider which issues are most relevant to people in your community and which issues you're comfortable explaining. Along with the fact sheet about registered dental hygienists in Canada ([www.cdha.ca/DidYouKnowDH](http://www.cdha.ca/DidYouKnowDH)), use the one-page briefing notes below which outline top priorities:

- Improving access to preventive oral care in rural and remote communities ([www.cdha.ca/RuralRemote](http://www.cdha.ca/RuralRemote))
- Meeting the oral health needs of seniors and older adults ([www.cdha.ca/seniors](http://www.cdha.ca/seniors))
  - o Standards for oral health care in long-term care facilities ([www.cdha.ca/LTCstandards](http://www.cdha.ca/LTCstandards))
  - o Public funding for dental coverage ([www.cdha.ca/SeniorsCoverage](http://www.cdha.ca/SeniorsCoverage))

Each message is clearly targeted to address one issue, whether it be access to care in rural and remote communities or making sure that seniors continue to benefit from preventive oral care even after retirement. Discussing these priorities in the local context is an important strategy for success, and will create a more interesting dialogue between you and your representative. Be sure to bring along materials that can be left behind for elected officials to review and reference at a later time. The meeting guide (Appendix B) outlines the materials to take to the meeting and other pertinent information. It's normal to be nervous when first meeting your elected official. Remember, you elected them and it's an important part of their job to meet with their constituents. You can also invite a colleague from the same riding to join you for support.

### 3 Engage the Politician During the Meeting

It is important to capture the politician's interest in the first 30 seconds of your interview. Introduce yourself, where you live, where you work, and what your top priority is for the discussion. Stories are very effective. You may even consider bringing a client/patient along, if relevant to the issue you are discussing. This is your elevator pitch. Use the meeting guide to ensure you make the most of your 15 to 30 minutes (Appendix B).

If you are asked a question and you don't know the answer, explain that you would be happy to get the answers for them following the meeting. This response provides an opportunity for you to follow up with the elected official later; CDHA can help you locate the necessary information. Finally, at the conclusion of the meeting, don't forget to ask the official for a photo that you can share on social media.

### 4 Follow Up After the Meeting

Following your meeting, it is important to write down everything that was discussed. Please complete the meeting debrief form and share it with CDHA staff for ongoing record keeping and relationship building (Appendix C).

Achieving advocacy goals requires strong relationship building and maintaining open dialogue with elected officials. For this reason, it is important to send a letter of thanks to the politician for taking the time to meet with you, hear your concerns, and discuss solutions. Use the letter template as a guide (Appendix D).

If you took a photo at the end of the meeting, share it on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) where politicians are very active. You can find politicians' Facebook pages by searching their names in the Facebook search toolbar. You can find their Twitter handles at <http://politwitter.ca/>.

Finally, if the elected official requires any additional information or support in writing a letter to a cabinet minister, it is critical to provide them with that support.

## Contact CDHA

Additional resources can be found on the CDHA website ([www.cdha.ca/advocacy](http://www.cdha.ca/advocacy)). For more information, please contact Paula Benbow, manager of health policy, at [pbenbow@cdha.ca](mailto:pbenbow@cdha.ca) or 1-800-267-5235 ext. 123.

# APPENDIX A

## Letter Template for Meeting Request

{insert date}

{insert address}

Dear {insert name}:

As a constituent in your riding and a **{dental hygienist/insert role}** serving your community, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the vital role that dental hygienists, members of the sixth largest registered health profession in Canada, play in ensuring optimal oral and overall health for Canadians. I would also like to meet with you to discuss the oral health issues affecting individuals living in your constituency.

Oral health is essential for overall wellness and it is an integral part of physical, social, and mental well-being. Poor oral health can cause pain, diminish quality of life, and contribute to serious life-threatening illnesses. Oral diseases are often chronic, painful, and disfiguring, and can disrupt eating, sleeping, and growth patterns, which ultimately diminishes quality of life. In addition, over two (2) million school days and four (4) million working days are lost every year due to dental visits or dental sick days. Vulnerable groups, such as low-income families and those living in rural and remote communities, carry the greatest burden of oral diseases. This is particularly concerning because most oral diseases can be prevented by daily home oral care and professional dental hygiene services.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you in the coming weeks to discuss these issues and the positive steps that can be taken to improve the oral and overall health of people in our riding and across Canada. Please contact me at **{insert phone number and email}** should you have any questions and to set up a meeting.

Sincerely,

# APPENDIX B

## Meeting Guide

1. Develop your elevator pitch. Most government representatives will afford you only 15 to 30 minutes, so your message should be brief and concise.
2. Determine which issues you would like to discuss and bring along the necessary materials to support your messages. These may include:
  - a. Dental hygiene fact sheet ([www.cdha.ca/DidYouKnowDH](http://www.cdha.ca/DidYouKnowDH))
  - b. One-page briefing notes on your discussions topics:
    - Improving access to preventive oral care in rural and remote communities ([www.cdha.ca/RuralRemote](http://www.cdha.ca/RuralRemote))
    - Meeting the oral health needs of seniors and older adults ([www.cdha.ca/seniors](http://www.cdha.ca/seniors))
      - o Standards for oral health care in long-term care facilities ([www.cdha.ca/LTCstandards](http://www.cdha.ca/LTCstandards))
      - o Public funding for dental coverage ([www.cdha.ca/SeniorsCoverage](http://www.cdha.ca/SeniorsCoverage))
  - c. Any additional background materials relevant to the issues
  - d. Photos (be sure to obtain consent if you wish to share images of clients)
  - e. Business cards

You may wish to prepare folders containing all of the materials for everyone attending the meeting, including yourself. It is wise to bring a few extra folders in case additional staff attend.

3. Identify the principal spokesperson if there are two or more of you attending the meeting. Ensure that each individual has an opportunity to speak to one of the topics; all individuals should feel free to comment at any time.
4. Open your meeting by thanking the representative for having taken the time from his or her busy schedule to meet with you and discuss these important issues.
5. Introduce yourself (and your guests, if any) by giving your name, title, and profession. Begin by asking how familiar they are with the profession. Explain that there are more than 29,000 dental hygienists across Canada, making it the sixth largest registered health profession in the country. Dental hygienists are committed to improving access to oral health care for the overall health and well-being of Canadians. You can also add the number of dental hygienists in your province.
6. Describe the purpose and objectives of your meeting:
  - a. To improve the oral health of all Canadians, especially underserved groups;
  - b. To encourage the implementation of cost-effective, equitable, and sustainable programs and policies;
  - c. To optimize existing resources to better meet the needs of Canadians and governments.
7. Share personal stories with your elected official. They can be very receptive to information that resonates with them and with residents in their constituency.

Briefly summarize the key points on the issue(s) you are raising using the one-page briefing notes. Make sure to add that he or she may personally contact you or Ondina Love, CDHA chief executive officer, at [olove@cdha.ca](mailto:olove@cdha.ca), for additional information or clarification.

# APPENDIX C

## Meeting Debrief Form

Your name and city/riding: \_\_\_\_\_

Home/business address: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of individual(s) you met with: \_\_\_\_\_

Representative's political party: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. Was the representative familiar with oral care issues?

Yes

Somewhat

No

### 2. Was the representative supportive of policy changes to promote preventive oral care?

Yes

Somewhat

No

### General comments and feedback from the meeting

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Please return completed form to Paula Benbow,  
CDHA manager of health policy, at [pbenbow@cdha.ca](mailto:pbenbow@cdha.ca).

# APPENDIX D

## Follow-Up Thank You Letter

{insert date}

{insert address}

Dear {insert name}:

I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me on **{insert date}**. I greatly appreciated the opportunity to share with you the vital role that dental hygienists play in helping to ensure optimal oral and overall health for individuals living in your constituency.

As discussed during our meeting, **{personal letter with information on your discussion topics}**.

Once again, I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet. I am confident that we can achieve sustainable and equitable access to oral health care by optimizing existing resources. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact me at **{insert phone number and email}**.

Sincerely,