



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

For immediate release (Offert en français sur demande)

## Media Release

# Canadian Dental Hygienists Association Releases Policy Paper on A National Oral Health Care Plan for Canadian Seniors

June 14, 2022 (Ottawa, ON) – In a [policy paper](#) released today, the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) is calling on the Government of Canada to commit \$2 billion over five years to provincial and territorial governments to deliver a pan-Canadian oral health program that would give Canadian seniors, wherever they may live, access to preventive oral care services to help them maintain good oral health and, consequently, better overall health.

The paper, *A National Oral Health Care Plan for Canadian Seniors: Making Progress Towards a Vision of Oral Health For All*, was commissioned by CDHA's board of directors following the federal government's 2019 throne speech commitment to explore universal dental care. The release of today's paper aims to inform public policy discussions on the essential aspects of a public oral health care program for Canada's most vulnerable populations, with a focus on seniors.

The paper calls on the Government of Canada to take specific actions to implement a pan-Canadian approach to oral health coverage for lower-income seniors, ages 65 and older:

1. Convene and lead discussions among provinces and territories on unifying public programs by setting minimum pan-Canadian requirements for provincial and territorial oral health care programs for lower-income seniors, with the ultimate goal of improving seniors' access to oral health care across the country.
2. Work towards agreements between provinces and territories and the federal government that include a clear commitment to the development of strategies, plans, and performance metrics by each jurisdiction, with a public reporting mechanism on progress.
3. Provide \$2 billion over five years to provincial and territorial governments in exchange for their commitment to recognize oral health care as a shared health priority.

The federal government's recent commitment of \$5.3 billion to establish a new dental care program for low-income Canadians is a good sign of progress. Ahead of the federal program's rollout to seniors in 2023, CDHA hopes this paper will provide the federal and provincial governments with critical policy analysis and evidence-based recommendations for improving access to oral health care for seniors in Canada. Our recommendations go beyond simply increasing funding to existing provincial and territorial dental care programs. Many of these programs place limitations on who is eligible for coverage and the scope of preventive services provided. They also fail to recognize dental hygienists as eligible oral health care providers. And some jurisdictions don't have any government-funded oral health programs to support low-income earners or those without dental insurance coverage.

CDHA's seniors-first approach recognizes that, while there are many population groups in Canada that struggle to access professional oral care services, seniors face unique challenges when it comes to maintaining good oral health. Public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have made it apparent that seniors require unique, comprehensive access to all primary care services, including oral health care.

Findings from a [national public opinion poll](#) conducted earlier this year by Abacus Data on behalf of CDHA suggest that most Canadians agree, giving the current state of oral care for older adults and seniors a poor rating. The poll revealed that 86% of respondents support federal funding for seniors' oral care.

"Dental hygienists across Canada are acutely aware that our publicly funded health care system does not reflect how crucial oral health is to overall health," says CDHA President Wendy Stewart. "Only 6 percent of Canada's national dental expenditure is government-funded – the second-lowest rate worldwide among high-income countries," Stewart adds.

CDHA has been advocating for many years to improve access to oral health care for all persons living in Canada. As leaders on the frontlines of oral health care and service providers to millions of people in every part of the country, Canada's dental hygienists know first-hand the importance of good oral and overall health.

To learn more, read CDHA's [policy paper](#) and visit [cdha.ca/oralhealthforseniors](https://cdha.ca/oralhealthforseniors).

CDHA is the collective national voice of more than 30,000 dental hygienists in Canada, directly representing 21,000 individual members, including students. Since 1963, CDHA has worked to advance the profession and promote the importance of oral health. Dental hygiene is the sixth-largest regulated health profession in Canada, with professionals working in a variety of settings, including independent dental hygiene practice, with people of all ages, addressing issues related to oral health. For more information on oral health, visit [dentalhygienecanada.ca](https://dentalhygienecanada.ca).

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