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It is not enough to expand the status quo in new federal dental program

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Dental caries (cavities) is the number one preventable oral disease in the world. Yet, even in a country as privileged as Canada, over 6.5 million Canadians face significant barriers to receiving proper oral health care. This adds to the burden of untreated and late-treated oral conditions and diseases, within an already strained health system.

The government and the NDP took an important step when they announced a dental care program to address the cost barriers that many Canadians face in accessing dental care.

The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) was very pleased to see the government announcement to provide oral health care to Canadians who are not covered through current government-funded or employer-sponsored plans, target groups CDHA has long been advocating for, including seniors, low-income Canadians, and children. However, the design and implementation of the program is critical.

While various administration and delivery models are being explored, the current patchwork of provincial and federal systems have long had significant issues. Many programs are inadequate in the scope of preventive services covered, limited in eligibility, and fail to recognize dental hygienists as eligible providers, thus restricting accessibility to oral health care. That's why it is not enough to expand the status quo within existing provincial dental care programs, which have left millions of Canadians with unmet needs.

CDHA is urging the federal government to deliver direct support to vulnerable Canadians within a national model. CDHA strongly supports the federal administration and delivery of the new program to ensure an equitable standard applies to all eligible people across the country.

Prevention is key for this new federal program, and all publicly financed oral health/dental programs. Canada's dental hygienists understand that oral health impacts overall health for life. It impacts people's productivity at school and at work. As essential oral health care providers, dental hygienists work every day to prevent and treat oral conditions and diseases by providing individualized preventive and therapeutic oral care services and treatments. It is imperative that a new dental care program includes Canada's strong and skilled workforce of more than 30,000 dental hygienists, working in collaboration with all regulated oral health providers.

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As the federal dental care plan sets to launch this year for children, CDHA welcomes a new program that provides person-centered, value-based, and prevention-oriented care to improve Canadians' oral health and overall health outcomes and ease the current burden on our health care system.

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