

**Ondina Love:**

Good morning. My name is Ondina Love, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA). I am joined today by the President of CDHA, Registered Dental Hygienist, Alexandra Sheppard, the Immediate Past President, Registered Dental Hygienist Francine Trudeau, and my colleague, Registered Dental Hygienist Sylvie Martel.

CDHA is the national voice of dental hygienists in Canada. Representing nearly 34,000 dental hygienists across the country, CDHA advocates for the advancement and promotion of the dental hygiene profession while maintaining a commitment to the public's oral health.

Dental hygiene is the sixth largest regulated health profession in Canada with professionals working in various settings, including independent dental hygiene practices, dental hygiene and dental offices, public health, hospitals, long-term care facilities, educational institutions, dental industry and more. Dental hygienists are also recognized providers under the Canadian Dental Care Plan.

We know that the cost of living continues to increase. Threats and tariffs from the Trump administration in the United States will have a devastating impact on the economy, placing more and more Canadians in increasingly precarious financial positions. During such political turmoil, Canadians should not also have to worry about access to health care.

**Oral health care is critical to maintaining optimal overall health and well-being.**

The federal government *must* continue to invest in affordable, accessible, and preventive oral health care. The sustainability and viability of this investment are crucial to improving access to essential oral health care for people across Canada.

**We know that improving access to oral health care is good for Canadians and our economy.** Federal investments in oral health care in Canada have several positive impacts, including:

- **Improved public health and support for vulnerable populations:** This includes seniors, children, people with disabilities, and others facing access barriers in receiving the dental care they need. Access to oral health care improves individuals' quality of life by reducing pain, improving nutrition, and boosting self-esteem. This can lead to better mental health and social well-being.
- **Increased productivity:** Poor oral health can lead to pain and infections, causing many days lost to school, work and everyday activities. For example, it was reported in 2013 that in Canada, over 40 million hours are lost annually due to dental-related issues, accounting for more than \$1 billion in productivity losses. Improving access to oral health care means students and employees are less likely to take sick days due to dental issues. Good oral health contributes to overall well-being, which can improve concentration and efficiency at work or in school.

- **Job creation:** The dental industry contributes to the economy by generating revenue and creating jobs. The industry grows as more people access dental care, leading to further job creation and economic benefits.
- **Cost savings to the health care system by reducing the need for emergency departments and physician' visits:** In Canada, a significant amount is spent on emergency room visits for dental-related pain. For instance, in Ontario alone, these visits were estimated to be at least \$31 million in 2017. In British Columbia, the cost of emergency room visits for dental pain is also significant. For example, CIHI data shows that in 2013-2014, in 29 of the 79 emergency departments in the province, the cost of such visits was an estimated \$1.53 million, which accounts for about 1% of all emergency department costs at these hospitals. Also, from 2001 to 2015, it was estimated that more than 70,000 visits were made to physicians in Ontario for dental-related issues.

Furthermore, most people going to emergency departments or physician's offices are from low-income backgrounds and do not receive the care they need to treat their dental-related issues. Many of these visits are due to issues like abscesses and non-traumatic tooth-related pain that could have been prevented.

This highlights the broader issue of access to dental care and the financial burden on the health care system. It's not just a cost in emergency departments.

Federal investment in oral health care enhances population health and supports economic stability and growth in Canada.

As primary care providers, dental hygienists play a critical role in delivering the care Canadians need and preventing and treating oral diseases through evidence-informed practice.

**Federal investment in affordable, accessible oral health care is good for Canadians**, especially vulnerable populations and those living in rural and remote communities. Across the country, dental hygienists see the positive results first-hand:

**Alexandra Sheppard:**

My name is Alexandra Sheppard. I am a practising Registered Dental Hygienist and the President of CDHA.

I have provided treatment to many patients who are covered by the Canadian Dental Care Plan. These patients, especially those with a significant amount of dental disease, are truly grateful for this national plan.

[SPACE FOR BRIEF PERSONAL ANECDOTE]

Dental hygienists know that caries, severe periodontitis (gum disease), abscesses, and other conditions that negatively impact a patient's overall health are preventable. We also know that affordability is the number one barrier to care.

We care about Canadians and their access to affordable oral health services. That is why CDHA is committed to working with the federal government to ensure all people living in Canada receive preventive oral health care, when and where they need it.

We urge the federal government to continue consultations and engagement with dental hygienists and dental hygiene experts, including national and provincial professional associations, qualified oral health clinicians, disease prevention experts, dental public health specialists, researchers, educators, and other stakeholders.

Thank you.