

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 our Immediate Past President, and Quebec-based Registered Dental Hygienist, Francine Trudeau.

CDHA is the collective national voice of nearly 34,000 dental hygienists working in Canada in diverse settings, including independent dental hygiene practices such as storefronts and mobile clinics, dental offices, public health, hospitals, long-term care facilities, educational institutions, dental industry, and more.

Dental hygienists are essential to Canada's health system, delivering individualized oral health care that improves overall health outcomes and well-being. By focusing on prevention and education, dental hygienists contribute to a more sustainable, equitable, and resilient health system. That's why it's essential for governments, policymakers, and health system leaders to recognize oral health as a foundational element of overall health.

We're seeing this recognition in action.

Dental hygienists are playing a key role in delivering the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), one of the country's largest social programs. CDHA welcomes the plan's expansion, which is improving access to care for millions.

Since applications opened in December 2023, over 2 million Canadians have received care through the CDCP—highlighting both the need and the momentum behind this federal investment. More than 25,000 oral health professionals are now participating, including over 1,200 independent dental hygienists. And while not separately counted by the program, many dental hygienists working within dental clinics are also contributing to the delivery of this important program.

With the CDCP into its second year of delivery, our members are saying the plan has helped many patients who, otherwise, wouldn't have sought preventive care from a dental hygienist.

As the new federal government focuses on economic growth and affordability, CDHA urges that oral health care remain central to this agenda. Affordable access to oral care is not just about well-being—it's a smart investment in Canada's long-term economic and social health.

CDHA's analysis shows that the overall outlook for the dental hygiene profession is stable. While some attrition is expected in any field, the number of new graduates entering the profession continues to offset, and exceed, those leaving, helping to maintain a balanced and sustainable workforce.

At the same time, where staffing gaps or instabilities do exist, findings from CDHA's 2023 Healthy & Respectful Workplace Survey suggest these are more often linked to challenges in the workplace environment, such as poor working conditions, uncompetitive compensation, or burnout levels, rather than actual shortages in the supply of dental hygienists. This study reported that 6 in 10 respondents personally experienced and/or witnessed some form of harassment, bullying, abuse and/or violence in their workplace.

We must also address recent proposals in Ontario and Alberta that would allow internationally trained dentists—who are not yet licensed in Canada—to practice dental hygiene without meeting established standards. CDHA strongly opposes these proposals. They undermine the preventive care dental hygienists provide and could put patients at risk.

We call on federal and provincial governments to uphold professional standards and ensure changes to the oral health system are guided by evidence, equity, and patient safety.

That said, we recognize regional disparities in access to care. Until we have comprehensive workforce data across all oral health professions, we can't draw broad conclusions. We urge governments to engage meaningfully with dental hygienist organizations on key policy areas, including:

- Education policy and training readiness
- International student permits and licensure pathways
- Labour market trends, working conditions, and regional access

Recent federal changes to international student permits have raised concerns among dental hygiene programs. These changes may impact budgets, staffing, and program sustainability.

Finally, we must correct the narrative.

Claims of a widespread dental hygienists' shortages are often exaggerated and unsupported. **Let me be clear: such assertions are unverifiable and false.**

My remarks today have touched on a range of important issues—from the evolving role of dental hygienists in national programs like the CDCP, to workforce sustainability, upholding safe practice standards, and the importance of evidence-based policy. Above all, CDHA remains committed to advancing the oral health of Canadians. Working alongside our provincial dental hygienist associations and other national oral health partners, we look forward to working collaboratively with Parliamentarians and the new federal government to strengthen health systems, support the dental hygiene profession, and ensure equitable access to preventive oral health care for all.

Thank you. I will now turn to Francine to deliver our remarks in French.