

REMARKS - February 26 Press Conference - 8 a.m.

[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

- President, and British Columbia-based Registered Dental Hygienist, Donna Lee
- Board Director, and New Brunswick-based Registered Dental Hygienist, Nicole Mainville
- and our Director of Dental Hygiene Practice and Registered Dental Hygienist, Sylvie Martel

CDHA is the collective national voice of over 35,000 dental hygienists working in Canada in diverse settings, including independent dental hygiene practices such as storefronts and mobile clinics, as well as dental offices, public health, hospitals, long-

term care facilities, educational institutions, dental industry, and more.

Today, we are sharing new national public opinion research conducted by Abacus Data that provides a clear picture of how Canadians view dental hygienists, preventive care, the CDCP and the future of dental care in Canada.

Canadians trust dental hygienists. In fact, they are among the most trusted health professionals in the country. Nearly all Canadians—96 percent—hold a positive impression of dental hygienists, and more than eight in ten consider them an essential or important part of the health care system.

This trust is not accidental. It reflects decades of prevention-focused care, patient education, and a strong commitment to early detection, disease

prevention and improving oral and overall health outcomes.

Canadians are remarkably aligned on one key point: prevention must be the foundation of dental care policy.

Eight in ten Canadians believe federal funding should prioritize preventive dental care—either exclusively or equally alongside restorative care. Nearly nine in ten agree that investing in prevention is the best way to reduce long-term costs to the health system. This consensus spans all political, demographic, and regional lines. Canadians understand that prevention is not only good health policy—it is good economic policy.

Most Canadians are committed to their oral health:

- Seven in ten visit an oral health professional at least once a year

- Nearly three-quarters accessed dental care in the past year
- The majority did so for routine, preventive care
- Seventy percent report seeing a dental hygienist annually

This reinforces the central role dental hygienists play in maintaining the oral health of Canadians.

Dental coverage is widespread, with 78 percent of Canadians reporting some form of coverage. One-third—32 percent—are now covered through the Canadian Dental Care Plan.

Awareness of the CDCP is extremely high at 85 percent, and support is equally strong. Canadians believe in this program, and they believe it will improve access to care.

Among those aware of the program, 92 percent say it will improve access to dental care in Canada.

I'll now turn the podium over to Donna Lee.

Who Is Using the CDCP?

Uptake is highest among those who need it most:

Lower-income Canadians, people without private insurance, and residents of rural or smaller communities.

More than four in ten Canadians have applied for the program for themselves or a dependent.

Early experiences with the CDCP are overwhelmingly positive:

- 95 percent say the application process was easy
- 84 percent have been approved
- Two-thirds of approved applicants have already used their coverage
- 92 percent say the program has improved their personal access to care

- 73 percent say it enabled access to services they previously could not obtain
- 84 percent say their coverage meets their needs

These are powerful indicators that the program is working.

Non-use among approved applicants is largely due to timing—new enrollment or upcoming appointments—not dissatisfaction or barriers to finding a provider.

Despite progress, affordability remains the single biggest barrier to dental care.

Nearly half of Canadians—49 percent—say cost still prevents them from accessing dental care as often as they would like. Financial pressure is causing many to delay care:

- 35 percent of those WITH dental coverage still avoid accessing care due to cost

This is more common among younger adults, women, lower-income Canadians, rural residents, and those without dental benefits.

The consequences are real. Embarrassment, increased pain, worsening dental complications, difficulty eating, and in some cases, emergency care or missed work.

Canadians overwhelmingly support integrating dental care within Canada's universal health system. Ninety-one percent believe dental care should be included—with most favouring full coverage and others supporting coverage for preventive services or targeted populations.

The message is clear: Canadians want a system where oral health is treated as health.

Dental hygienists are trusted. They are essential. They are prevention experts. And they are ready to play an even greater role in improving access to care, advancing health equity, and strengthening Canada's oral health system.

Thank you.

I am pleased to turn the floor to Sylvie and Nicole who will present our remarks in French.