



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

CDHA's Virtual Parliament Hill Day 2021 **#voice4oralhealth**

Rob (MP Powlo...



Laying the Groundwork

This year, CDHA's Parliament Hill Day was very different from years past. It began the evening before with a virtual briefing via Zoom for CDHA board directors and staff on the status of the minority parliament, the federal government's priorities, and best practices when engaging in grassroots advocacy with parliamentarians and their staff.

After this virtual training session and discussions, board directors and staff were well equipped with the tools to effectively articulate our priorities to members of Parliament (MPs), a senator, and political staff members.

Priorities

During the full day of virtual meetings on February 18, CDHA's board directors and staff raised awareness of the dental hygiene profession, the need to improve access to oral care, and the importance of developing of national standards for oral health for seniors living in long-term care homes. Additional talking points focused on the impact of the pandemic on the dental hygiene profession and a universal oral health care plan for seniors.

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Dental Hygienists in Canada

The meetings with parliamentarians and staff were a perfect opportunity to share information about how dental hygienists, like so many other health care professionals, were affected at the start of the pandemic. CDHA board directors revealed that 87% of registered dental hygienists (RDHs) were temporarily laid off due to the pandemic and 2% lost their jobs. They also noted that 91% of dental hygienists received either the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or Employment Insurance (EI) during their layoffs.

In addition, the lack of availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) for oral health professionals, specifically N95 masks and gloves, was discussed. CDHA board directors and staff stressed that dental hygienists, as essential health care professionals working in close proximity and for prolonged periods with clients who may be infectious yet asymptomatic, should be given priority access to COVID-19 vaccines.

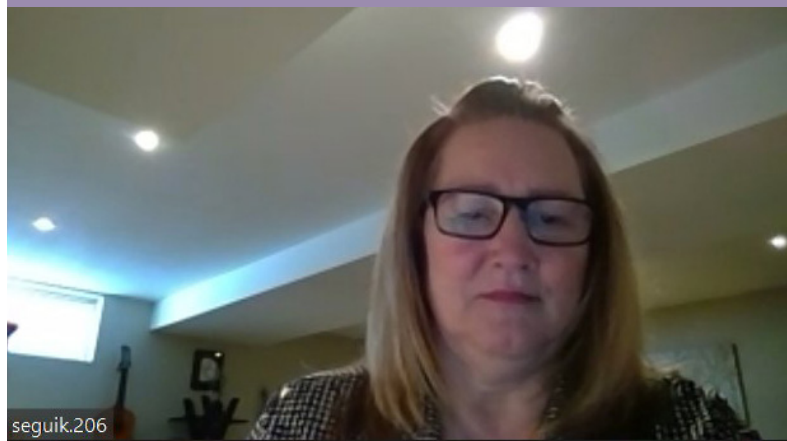
Universal Oral Care for Seniors

Canadian seniors, most of whom lack dental benefits or are living on a fixed income, often forego the expense of professional oral care, putting themselves at risk of developing gum disease or other painful oral conditions. Left untreated, gum disease can lead to more serious systemic health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, aspiration pneumonia, and stroke, with potentially life-threatening consequences.

As experts in preventive oral health care, dental hygienists recognize the heavy burden that financial barriers to oral care place on Canada's health care system. CDHA board directors and staff emphasized this point during their meetings, and urged the federal government to accelerate steps to achieve a universal, comprehensive oral health care program for seniors, beginning with a study on a plan for this vulnerable population.

National Standards for Oral Health in Long-Term Care Homes

In a number of meetings, CDHA board directors led conversations about the work of dental hygienists in long-term care homes and the need to support residents with national oral health standards for these settings. They explained that residents in long-term care are at greater risk for poor oral health and complications requiring additional care as they age because daily mouth care is often lacking in these facilities. While there was some discussion about the role of the provinces and territories in long-term care, CDHA's main message was that the federal government must work in collaboration with the provinces and territories to make new targeted investments in oral health for residents living in long-term care.



Building Relationships

CDHA continues to build strong relationships with members of Parliament who are very supportive of the work we are doing to ensure that all Canadians can enjoy optimal oral health. As a result of the meetings during our virtual Hill Day and in the days that followed, CDHA is now well positioned to further influence the national health care agenda.

These meetings also allowed us to gather information on upcoming studies, programs, initiatives, and opportunities to further advocate for policies and investments that support preventive oral care. It is our goal to see the federal government take a leadership role and work with provincial governments and key stakeholders to develop national standard for oral health in long-term care homes and to introduce a universal oral health care plan for seniors. We will continue to work with all parties to develop policies that will ensure access to care for all Canadians to help improve and protect their oral and overall health.

Meetings

The board and staff met virtually with the following officials:

- Ken McDonald, MP for Avalon
- Wayne Easter, MP for Malpeque; Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance
- Randy Hoback, MP for Prince Albert
- Stephanie Muccilli, Director of Policy, Office of the Minister of Seniors
- Tony Van Bynen, MP for Newmarket–Aurora; Member of the Standing Committee on Health
- Darren Fisher, MP for Dartmouth–Cole Harbour; Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health
- Don Davies, MP for Vancouver Kingsway; NDP Health Critic
- Senator Josée Forest-Niesing, Member of the Social Affairs, Science and Technology Committee (Independent Senators Group)
- Geoff Regan, MP for Halifax West; former Speaker of the House of Commons
- Diane Finley, MP for Haldimand–Norfolk; former Cabinet minister
- Larry Maguire, MP for Brandon–Souris; Member of the Standing Committee on Health
- Marcus Powlowski, MP for Thunder Bay–Rainy River; Member of the Standing Committee on Health
- Luc Theriault, MP for Montcalm; Vice-Chair for the Standing Committee on Health
- Mumilaaq Qaqqaq, MP for Nunavut

For more information please contact:

Juliana Jackson | Manager of Policy, Research, and Government Relations | jjackson@cdha.ca