

RE: Government of Canada Pre-Budget Consultations 2023

Submission from the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA)

February 9, 2023

CDHA is the collective national voice of more than 31,000 dental hygienists working in Canada, directly representing 21,000 individual members, including students. Since 1963, CDHA has worked to advance the profession and promote the importance of oral health.

CDHA's top priorities for Budget 2023

(1) Invest in responding to the oral health care needs of residents in long-term care

(LTC) homes across the country. The Government of Canada should work in collaboration with provinces, territories, and the LTC sector to make new targeted investments that address oral health care for residents living in LTC, among other comprehensive care and physical infrastructure standards to improve the quality of care. The federal government should provide targeted funding to provinces/territories who adopt, implement, and enforce the implementation of new published national standards for Canada's LTC homes, including a focus on the inclusion of oral health professionals on care teams.

(2) The Government of Canada should expand its work toward the implementation of its long-term federal dental care program for low-income Canadians.

This work should include continual consultation with oral health stakeholders (including national professional associations) and other health system experts to ensure the program remains responsive for many years to come.

(3) Improve access to oral health care in rural and remote communities.

Advance the commitment to expand the list of professionals eligible under the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program by adding registered dental hygienists to support improved access to oral health care.

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(1) Invest in responding to the oral health care needs of residents in LTC homes across the country. The Government of Canada should work in collaboration with provinces, territories, and the LTC sector to make new targeted investments that address oral health care for residents living in LTC, among other comprehensive care and physical infrastructure standards to improve the quality of care. The federal government should provide targeted funding to provinces/territories who adopt, implement, and enforce the implementation of new published national standards for Canada's LTC homes, including a focus on inclusion of oral health professionals on care teams.

Oral health professionals and researchers in Canada agree that good oral health is vitally important for people of all ages and even more so for older adults, seniors, and the most vulnerable who are residing in LTC homes.

Dental hygienists working with residents in LTC homes see firsthand many oral health issues and concerns that are not recognized by others. Oral conditions and diseases can cause pain, discomfort, difficulties chewing, eating, and swallowing, and are also associated with heart and lung diseases, diabetes, and stroke.

According to a national poll conducted in January 2022 by [Abacus Data for CDHA](#), nearly all Canadians believed that oral health care should be included in the development of new national standards for LTC. The poll of 2,200 Canadians revealed that 88% wanted to see oral health care incorporated into the federal government's long-awaited national standards for LTC homes. Most Canadians also gave the current state of oral care for older adults and seniors a poor rating.

CDHA notes that oral health is reflected in the [recently released national standards for LTC](#) and we hope to see that services in LTC homes will adapt to increasingly complex health care needs of aging and dependent Canadians, and this includes their oral health needs. It's time to overcome longstanding challenges and barriers to oral health care in LTC homes.

The next federal budget must make targeted investments to strengthen Canada's LTC homes with:

- Care teams with dental hygienists.

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- Oral health services for residents including oral health assessments, personalized oral health care plans, and daily mouth care.
- Oral health education and training for all non-oral health care professionals who provide direct care to residents.

CDHA further calls on all levels of government and the LTC sector to work towards the implementation of recently published new national LTC services standard in support better care for LTC residents. For real impact across the country, the legislation of the new voluntary standards, along with targeted investments, should be part of the federal government's expanded work to move forward with the development of the [Safe Long-Term Care Act](#), to ensure that seniors are guaranteed the care they deserve, no matter where they live.

As our top priority for Budget 2023, CDHA asks the federal government to ensure adequate funding to support real, positive oral health outcomes for those who need it the most, including all residents in LTC homes across Canada.

(2) The Government of Canada should expand its work toward the implementation of its long-term federal dental care program for low-income Canadians, including by continually consulting with oral health stakeholders (including national professional associations) and health system experts to ensure the program remains responsive for many years to come.

Canadians without private dental insurance coverage or access to publicly funded provincial or federal dental programs are largely left to pay out-of-pocket for visits to an oral health professional. And without appropriate and regular oral health care, those with higher risk factors become more vulnerable to oral diseases and conditions, most of which are highly preventable. When it comes to the overall burden of illness, oral diseases are associated with, systemic conditions such as diabetes, respiratory, and cardiovascular conditions. Those with oral pain, discomfort, difficulties chewing, eating or swallowing often have no recourse but to visit overburdened doctors' offices and hospital emergency departments.

The problem is that many people in Canada are especially vulnerable when it comes to maintaining good oral health because they cannot afford to pay for the oral health care services they need, especially if they do not have access to private dental insurance plans.

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At the same other, others have limited local access to oral health care providers/services in their rural or remote communities.

While some provinces and territories have programs that provide coverage for oral health services to some people, such as children, recipients of social assistance programs, or seniors who meet certain criteria, these are very limited. Furthermore, public funding of oral health care services in most jurisdictions does not cover many of the preventive services required to support the ongoing maintenance of good oral health. However, with the recent launch of the [new interim Canada Dental Benefit](#), it is hoped that many eligible children across the country will gain access to the essential oral care needed in their formative years to prevent disease and improve overall health, while a Canada-wide dental care plan for eligible Canadian families is designed and implemented.

The next federal budget should support:

- Expanded work in relation to the implementation of the federal government's long-term federal dental care program for low-income Canadians, including by continually consulting with oral health stakeholders (including national professional associations) and other health system experts to ensure the program remains responsive for many years to come.

CDHA recognizes that the design of such a program is complex, and we remain committed to working in partnership with government and key experts to support the development and promotion of a successful program with a range of oral health services and supports.

(3) Improve access to oral health care in rural and remote communities.

Advance the commitment to expand the list of professionals eligible under the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program by adding registered dental hygienists to support improved access to oral health care.

Strengthening the Canadian economy requires helping more Canadians in underserved rural and remote communities get the health care they deserve. With more than [6 million Canadians living in rural areas](#), CDHA understands that access to extended health care services in rural and remote communities remains an ongoing challenge for many Canadians.

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Populations living in small, northern and geographically isolated communities do not have equitable access to oral health care as those living in urban centres may have. Geographic factors and health workforce constraints, perpetuate these issues, adding to access challenges.

For Canadians living in underserved rural and remote communities, extending the eligibility of the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program to include dental hygienists has the potential to increase access to more health services (which distinct from medicine and nursing).

As our top priority for Budget 2023, CDHA asks the federal government to support real, positive oral health outcomes for those who need it the most.

Associated Links

- [Overview of Canada's Dental Hygienists](#)
- [Overview of Independent Dental Hygiene Practice in Canada](#)
- [CDHA Statements: Canada Dental Benefit](#)
- [CDHA Discussion Paper: National Standards for Long-Term Care - Addressing Oral Health for Overall Health](#)
- [CDHA Policy Paper: A National Oral Health Care Plan for Canadian Seniors](#)
- [CDHA Article: Good dental care starts before the freezing and fillings](#) -published October 11, 2022
- [CDHA Feature: Significant step forward for children's oral health](#) -published January 23, 2023

For More Information

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