



THE CANADIAN DENTAL
HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION

L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES HYGIÉNISTES DENTAIRES

**Submission to the Department of Finance Canada Pre-Budget Consultations 2024
from the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA)**

February 8, 2024

CDHA is the collective national voice of more than 31,000 dental hygienists working in Canada, directly representing 22,000 individual members, including students. We remain committed to advancing the dental hygiene profession and promoting the importance of access to oral health care for people in Canada.

Summary of Priorities for Budget 2024

1. That the government's policy and program leadership for the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) continue to address important factors and challenging realities towards the implementation of sustainable coverage of affordable, accessible, and essential oral health care for Canadians.
2. That the government support the oral health care needs of residents in long-term care (LTC) homes across the country by investing in the implementation of the recently published national long-term care services standard and in the integration of team-based care that includes oral health professionals (working to their full scope of practice) to expand the overall quality of care.
3. That the government invest in improving access to oral health care in rural and remote communities, specifically by advancing its Budget 2022 commitment to expand the list of professionals eligible under the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness with the addition of dental hygienists.

PRIORITY 1: That the government's policy and program leadership for the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) continue to address important factors and challenging realities towards the implementation of sustainable coverage of affordable, accessible, and essential oral health care for Canadians.

Every Canadian deserves access to oral health care. Whereas CDHA and dental hygienists across the country have been calling alongside many others, for improvements in access to preventive oral health care services for vulnerable populations with higher risk factors, the upcoming roll-out of the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) is a significant and historical milestone for the health and well-being of people in Canada.

In following the government's progress towards the phased roll-out of the CDCP over the coming months (starting with seniors), the Government of Canada can best support the sustainability of affordable, accessible, and essential oral health coverage for Canadians through the Canadian Dental Care Plan and associated initiatives/spending by continuing to respond to important factors and challenges including:

- **The coverage of essential preventive services** (including dental hygiene examinations, scaling, sealants, fluoride, therapies to prevent gum disease and caries, personalized oral health education, health promotion counseling) within the context of clear, transparent, and evidence-informed disease prevention and person-centred principles.
- **Fair and competitive remuneration rates and established fees for covered services delivered by independent dental hygienists** who play a vital role in delivering the CDCP and thus underpin increased access to oral health care services for Canadians.
- **Administrative efficiencies and clarity** to support the experience of both Canadians who will sign-up and register with the CDCP and eligible oral health providers who will participate in the CDCP and bill directly for reimbursement and contribute to the processing of claims by Sun Life, the contracted plan administrator.
- **Ongoing consultation and engagement with dental hygiene experts to get the CDCP policy and implementation right** - Health Canada must maintain ongoing dialogue with national and provincial professional associations, highly qualified oral health clinicians, dental public health specialists, disease prevention experts, and other stakeholders as part of a continuous improvement and responsive approach. In

this regard, CDHA recognizes that the design and implementation of the CDCP is complex, and we remain committed to working in partnership with federal departments, the health minister, and others towards filling existing gaps in coverage and complementing existing provincial and territorial dental programs.

- **Monitoring and evaluation** aimed at different facets of the CDCP to measure if the plan is achieving desired results and to support ongoing improvements of the plan. The reporting and dissemination of data and evaluation results to appropriate CDCP partners (including providers and provider-organizations) will be an integral part of understanding CDCP's impact on affordability, population-level access, oral health outcomes, inequities, and more.

PRIORITY 2: That the government support the oral health care needs of residents in long-term care (LTC) homes across the country by investing in the implementation of recently published national long-term care services standard and the integration of team-based care that includes oral health professionals (working to their full scope of practice) to expand the overall quality of care.

When we think about supporting older adults and seniors across Canada, having access to professional oral health care is vitally important. This is especially true for the most vulnerable who live in LTC homes.

Dental hygienists also think about dignity of LTC residents as they see firsthand many oral health-related concerns and illnesses 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, stroke, an increased risks of aspiration pneumonia.

In the wake of the pandemic and the [recently published national LTC services standard](#), there is consensus that services in LTC homes need to adapt to increasingly complex health care needs of aging and dependent Canadians. CDHA emphasizes that the oral health needs of LTC residents should be prioritized towards overcoming longstanding challenges and barriers to oral health care in LTC homes.

Most importantly, the federal government can invest in:

- Team-based care that includes dental hygienists working to their full scope of practice.

- Oral health services for every resident including oral health assessments, personalized oral health care plans, daily mouth care, and minimally invasive treatments ensuring basic function.
- 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. The legislation of these new voluntary standards, along with targeted investments, should tie into the government’s development of the [federal Safe Long-Term Care Act](#), to ensure that seniors are guaranteed the care they deserve, no matter where they live.

PRIORITY 3: That the government invest in improving access to oral health care in rural and remote communities, specifically by advancing its Budget 2022 commitment to expand the list of professionals eligible under the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness with the addition of dental hygienists.

With more than [6 million Canadians living in rural areas](#), there is more shared work to do towards helping underserved rural and remote communities get the health care they deserve, including oral health care as an essential part of overall health.

Improving access to primary health care services in rural and remote communities is a complex issue demanding a wide range of responses. Since 2013, one such response from the federal government has focused on attracting health providers to work and remain in these communities with the offering of Canada Student Loan (CSL) forgiveness to help incentivize family physicians, nurses, and nurse practitioners to work in underserved rural and remote parts of the country that lack the primary health care they need.

Providing equal opportunities for other health professions to access federal student loan forgiveness can position rural and remote communities with broader access to essential health care services. Whereas Budget 2022 committed to expand the list of eligible occupations and review the definition of rural communities, there has been no announcement to date on the expanded list of eligible professions. CDHA reemphasizes

the inclusion of dental hygienists and other oral health professionals in the expanded list of professionals eligible for CSL forgiveness.

This specific expansion would complement the government's investments in the Canada Dental Benefit and the Canadian Dental Care Plan. It would help strengthen the distribution of oral health providers in rural and remote communities by incentivizing eligible health providers to work in those communities. This is a real and tangible measure in helping more Canadians get the oral health care they need.

Associated Links For More Information

- [Backgrounder: Canada's Dental Hygienists](#)
- [Backgrounder: Independent Dental Hygiene Practice in Canada](#)
- [CDHA Advocacy: New Federal Investments](#)
- [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 Op-Ed: Good dental care starts before the freezing and fillings \(October 2022\)](#)
- [CDHA Feature: Significant step forward for children's oral health \(January 2023\)](#)