



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

The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association

2021 Federal Election Brief



It's time to support
seniors' oral health.

August 2021

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It's time to support seniors' oral health.

The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) is the collective, national voice of more than 30,000 dental hygienists in Canada and the sixth largest regulated health profession in the country. We are committed to working with government to achieve results that will make our health care system more accessible and efficient.

Oral health is fundamental to overall health and wellness. It's why CDHA believes that all Canadians should have access to preventive oral hygiene services.

Gaps in Canada's publicly funded health care system have left some people unable to access the professional oral health care they need. For many Canadians, access to oral health care is largely tied to their workplace benefits if they have dental coverage, or out of pocket spending if they have the financial means.

In the 2021 federal election, CDHA is proposing smart, reasonable, and necessary priorities for the next federal government to support seniors' oral health. Our goal is to ensure that oral health care can be accessed by everyone, especially those who need help the most.

Priorities for seniors' oral health

New federal funding for national oral health care: seniors and low-income Canadians

National standards for long-term care with an oral health component



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New federal funding for national oral health care: seniors and low-income Canadians

By 2031, one in four Canadians will be over age 65, with many seniors retaining most, if not all, of their natural teeth.

Millions of Canadians do not have access to professional oral health care, which has an impact on their overall health. Sadly, this is the reality for many seniors and low-income Canadians. Those who do not have dental coverage and cannot afford the additional expense to receive oral hygiene services are at greater risk for poor oral health and overall health.

Many of the broader issues relating to the burden of oral diseases and access to oral health care for vulnerable groups that existed prior to the onset of COVID-19, have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Pre-pandemic results from public opinion polling conducted for CDHA found that:

- 4 in 10 Canadians do not have dental benefits. Those without coverage are most likely to be seniors, have a lower income, or live in a rural area, Atlantic Canada, or Quebec.
- 56% of Canadians over age 60 have no dental benefits coverage. As a result, older Canadians tend to be less frequent users of oral care services.
- More than 1 in 5 Canadians have not sought professional oral care in over 2 years.

WHAT THE NEXT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAN DO

Take needed action to incentivize provinces and territories to develop preventive oral care supports for low-income Canadians and seniors. Provinces and territories that establish and deliver oral care supports for low-income Canadians and seniors would receive additional transfer funding from the federal government for these initiatives.

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National standards for long-term care with an oral health component

Poor oral health status in people living in long-term care homes is multifactorial in nature. It seldom results from a single underlying condition or cause, but rather from a combination of contributing and predisposing factors.

People often enter long-term care with pre-existing oral conditions such as periodontal disease, tooth decay, and broken or missing teeth. A significant decline in oral health status often follows which is primarily attributed to the inadequate provision of daily mouth care, among other factors.

Dental hygienists working with people living in long-term care homes across Canada witness many oral health issues and concerns that are not seen by other professionals. Oral diseases can cause pain, discomfort, difficulties chewing and swallowing, and are also associated with oral cancer, heart and lung diseases, diabetes, and stroke. That is why dental hygienists are calling for a specific focus on oral health care when it comes to the development, implementation, and accountability for national standards in long-term care homes across the country.

WHAT THE NEXT FEDERAL GOVERNMENT CAN DO

Work in collaboration with provinces and territories to make new targeted investments in oral health for residents living in long-term care. Lead the effort, in partnership with the provinces, territories, and oral health system experts, to ensure the inclusion of oral health in the development of national standards for Canada's long-term care homes.

Learn more about registered dental hygienists in Canada

www.cdha.ca/DidYouKnowDH

CDHA contacts

Juliana Jackson

Manager, policy, research, and government relations

advocacy@cdha.ca

1-800-267-5235 extension 123



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