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Canadian Dental Care Plan should focus on preventive oral health services

The federal government's recent rollout of the Canada Dental Benefit emphasizes the necessity of access to dental care.

When dental hygienists remind you to brush and clean between your teeth twice a day, they're not kidding around.

Decayed teeth, gum disease, and— in extreme cases—oral cancer are all results of untreated and late-treated oral conditions. Dental hygienists see these impacts when early and regular preventive care is neglected or nonexistent. It's why the profession has long called for expanded access to preventive oral care services for people in Canada.

Prevention is key to good oral health.

Oral health is an integral part of our overall health, well-being, and quality of life. It means that we can eat, talk, smile, and laugh free of pain and discomfort.

The federal government's recent rollout of the Canada Dental Benefit emphasizes the necessity of access to dental care. It's a welcome investment in the health and well-being of Canadians, and an incredible commitment to improving the oral health outcomes of millions across the country. While the benefit is a great first step in shifting the conversation from treatment to prevention, immediate and ongoing emphasis on this topic is critical to maintaining and enhancing good oral health. With the first iteration of the Canadian Dental Care Plan set to be released at the end of this year, it's the perfect time to talk about preventive care and what it should look like.

You do your part by brushing and flossing. Dental hygienists do theirs by assessing your risk for disease, and establishing therapies and treatments to prevent disease and restore or maintain gum health. Monitoring, detecting, and treating minor conditions or diseases in early stages stops them from becoming major issues that are painful, difficult, and costly to treat. That's why it is vital the coverage provided by the Canadian Dental Care Plan supports

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the prevention and early diagnosis of oral conditions and diseases by facilitating greater access to dental hygienists' services.

Getting this plan right for Canadians who need it most—like children, people living with disabilities, seniors, and those living in low-income households—means that the amount of coverage within the terms of the plan is just as critical as the types of services the plan provides. It's crucial that ongoing investments in the new Canadian Dental Care Plan have a focus on preventive oral health services that can improve oral and overall health outcomes for millions of Canadians.

The Canadian Dental Care Plan is a truly historic action on oral health care that will be remembered for generations. Dental hygienists across the country are optimistic about the transformational potential of this plan to ensure that Canadians' dental care needs are met. The future is bright.

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Based in New Brunswick, Anne Caissie is the president of the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association, a collective national voice of more than 31,000 dental hygienists working in Canada and promoting the importance of oral health for the Canadian public.

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