October 28, 2026

Opinion: Coverage is not the same as access to care: Canadian Dental Hygienists Association CEO

Re: “Federal dental plan expands access, but patients still face costs, denials, and gaps in care, report finds,” (The Hill Times, Oct. 12, p. 22).

Your Oct. 12 article gets the central point right: coverage is not the same as access to care.

The Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) is a major achievement, and the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) wants it to succeed. But the Canadian Dental Association’s two-year review, From Coverage to Care, shows how much work remains. Half of complete preauthorization requests are denied, and 37 per cent of patients who received care still report financial barriers. These findings call for practical fixes, not a retreat from the program.

Those fixes must start with prevention. Dental hygienists deliver the preventive care, oral health education, and early intervention that keep small problems from becoming costly ones. As the report notes, a denied or delayed treatment can turn a manageable condition into a more invasive and expensive one. Every financial or administrative obstacle to preventive care is a missed opportunity to improve health outcomes and avoid more complex and costly treatment later.

The federal government should review limits on preventive services and preauthorization processes; ensure that Canadians can access preventive care from qualified oral health professionals, including dental hygienists; and work with providers to identify barriers in underserved communities. It should also measure success by improvements in oral health outcomes, not simply by enrolment figures or claims paid.

CDHA stands ready to work with Health Canada and parliamentarians to strengthen the plan. The goal is simple: a CDCP that not only helps pay for treatment when problems arise, but also helps Canadians prevent those problems and maintain good oral health throughout their lives.

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