

National Oral Health Standards in Long-Term Care Homes



Registered dental hygienists understand that oral health can significantly affect overall health and quality of life for all Canadians, in particular for those living in long-term care homes. Oral diseases can cause pain, discomfort, bad breath, and difficulties chewing and swallowing. They are also associated with systemic health conditions, such as heart and lung diseases, diabetes, and adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Residents in long-term care are at risk for poor oral health and complications requiring additional care as they age, yet daily mouth care is often lacking in these facilities. Numerous studies¹ have identified high prevalence rates of periodontal disease, tooth decay, and poorly fitting dentures among residents in long-term care.

Dental hygienists can play an integral role in improving the oral health and quality of life of residents in long-term care by:

- Serving on interprofessional care teams.
- Carrying out oral health promotion, education, oral screening, and assessment programs. National standards should require that dental hygienists conduct oral health screenings of residents upon admission, oral health assessments within 90 days, and develop daily mouth care plans.
- Delivering education and training to other health care providers involved in supporting residents in long-term care.

¹Matthews DC, Clovis JB, Brilliant MGS, Filiaggi MJ, McNally ME, Kotzer RD, Lawrence HP. Oral health status of long-term care residents—a vulnerable population. *J Can Dent Assoc.* 2012;78:c3.

What the 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 experts, to set new national oral health standards for long-term care so that seniors receive the best preventive daily oral hygiene care possible and have direct access to dental hygiene services that support their overall health and enhance their quality of life.