

A National Oral Health Care Plan for Canadian Seniors

Towards a Vision of Oral Health for All



While many population groups in Canada face barriers to professional oral care, seniors are especially vulnerable to the health consequences of such limited access.

Oral and Overall Health of Canada's Seniors

- Higher prevalence of dental caries, periodontal (gum) disease, medically induced dry mouth (xerostomia), ill-fitting restorations or dentures, and oral fungal infections
- Higher prevalence of systemic diseases and conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and stroke, which may be complicated by periodontal disease
- Higher medication use, producing side effects that lead to oral discomfort, pain, and increased risk of caries
- Oral health-related quality of life dramatically affected by income disparities and access to care



The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of seniors during times of crisis.

Primary Access-to-Care Barriers



Cost



Geographic location



Mobility restrictions

Seniors in Canada are almost twice as likely to be without dental insurance than individuals under 65. Many lose their workplace dental benefits upon retirement. For low-income seniors, oral health care services are an expense that they simply cannot afford.



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Spending on Dental Care in Canada

For decades, Canada has ranked among OECD countries that spend the least on oral health care. The situation is only getting worse:

- 1980s: public spending on oral health care = 20%
- 2010s: public spending on oral health care = 6%

The federal government spends \$300 million per year on oral health care for specific populations (e.g., eligible First Nations, veterans, members of the RCMP, inmates of federal prisons).



Public spending on oral health care today
6 CENTS
out of every dollar

Public spending on general health care today
70 CENTS
out of every dollar

The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association calls on the Government of Canada to provide \$2 billion over five years (or \$400 million/year) to provincial and territorial governments to deliver a pan-Canadian oral health program for seniors.

Oral Health as a Policy Priority

- Access to professional oral care will help seniors maintain good oral and overall health as they age.
- Access to professional oral care will also reduce the burden on Canada's health care system. One in 100 emergency room visits are related to dental complaints, primarily from low-income adults without access to an oral health care provider, costing the system millions.

Dental Hygienists Are Essential for Seniors' Oral Health

The consequences of poor oral health are largely preventable with healthy habits and regular visits to oral health care providers, such as dental hygienists. Dental hygienists:

- assess the mouth and its structure
- develop a personalized care plan
- provide support and instruction for daily oral self-care
- provide preventive therapies to treat or control oral diseases

Better access to dental hygiene care is critical to our seniors' oral and overall health. By taking action now to advance the oral health of seniors, governments can help close the health care gap for this vulnerable population. A new pan-Canadian approach to dental coverage for low-income seniors will allow hundreds of thousands of seniors in Canada to receive the care they need to maintain their oral and overall health.