



**THE CANADIAN DENTAL  
HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION**

**L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE  
DES HYGIÉNISTES DENTAIRES**

**Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance  
Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2026 Budget**

**Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA)**

April 2026

*CDHA is the collective national voice of over 35,000 dental hygienists working in Canada, directly representing over 24,000 individual members, including students.*

### **Summary of Recommendations for Budget 2026**

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** That the federal government protect and strategically enhance preventive coverage within the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) as a fiscally responsible approach to improving health outcomes, reducing long-term treatment costs, and limiting downstream pressures on other parts of the health system.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** That the federal government embed oral health within existing pan-Canadian health workforce planning and initiatives to ensure that federal investments in oral health affordability and access are sustainable, efficient, and supported by a workforce capable of meeting current and future demand.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** That the federal government invest in targeted, community-based oral health infrastructure—particularly for seniors and long-term care settings—to improve system efficiency, reduce downstream health costs, and protect the value of existing investments in oral health care.

**RECOMMENDATION 1: That the federal government protect and strategically enhance preventive coverage within the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) as a fiscally responsible approach to improving health outcomes, reducing long-term treatment costs, and limiting downstream pressures on other parts of the health system.**

Through the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), life is becoming a little more affordable for eligible residents by saving them hundreds of dollars<sup>1</sup> each year, while also ensuring that millions of uninsured Canadians now have access to the oral health care they need in support of their overall health and well-being.

While expanded access is an important step forward, oral diseases remain among the most prevalent chronic diseases<sup>2</sup>, despite being largely preventable. The latest data from the Canadian Health Measures Survey Cycle 7 show that the prevalence of tooth decay among children and youth remained stable in 2022-2024, with more than half (approximately 57%) of children and youth having dental caries.<sup>3</sup> This data shows an ongoing challenge: the importance of investing in preventive oral health care at a young age to prevent disease before it appears. To maximize the value of the CDCP, preventive services must remain a central pillar of the program.

**Preventive care is cost-effective.** When preventive care is limited or delayed, costs are shifted—not avoided—through higher emergency department utilization, more complex dental and medical interventions, avoidable hospital-based procedures, and lost productivity due to untreated disease.

**Canadians agree—prevention is a smart investment.** Results from CDHA’s public opinion polling<sup>4</sup> conducted earlier this year by Abacus Data show that nearly 9 in 10 (88%) Canadians agree that the best way to reduce oral health care costs in Canada is to invest in preventive dental care, such as the work oral health professionals do to prevent issues like cavities, gingivitis, and oral cancer before they start.

As the federal government prepares Budget 2026 amid ongoing fiscal pressures, CDHA points to targeted enhancements to preventive coverage within the CDCP as prudent opportunities to

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<sup>1</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada. Canadian Dental Care Plan renewal season opens April 15. Government of Canada, April 2026. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2026/04/canadian-dental-care-plan-renewal-season-opens-april-15.html>

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization (WHO). Oral health. Fact sheet. March 2025. Available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/oral-health>

<sup>3</sup> Government of Canada. New direct measures suggest more adults are keeping their teeth, but gum health is declining, 2022 to 2024. Available at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/251201/dq251201a-eng.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Abacus Data. Canadian Public Opinion on the State of Oral Health in Canada. Public opinion research conducted for the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA), February 2026. Available at [https://files.cdha.ca/NewsEvents/tag/2026/CDHA\\_Feb2026\\_Public\\_Opinion\\_Oral\\_Health.pdf](https://files.cdha.ca/NewsEvents/tag/2026/CDHA_Feb2026_Public_Opinion_Oral_Health.pdf)

improve program efficiency, manage long-term expenditures, and strengthen economic and health returns on existing investments—without expanding eligibility or core program scope.

**Targeted, Cost-Conscious Opportunities:**

- Adjusting coverage limits for periodontal services (scaling and root planing) to better align with prevention and early disease management, reducing progression to higher cost treatment.
- Covering examinations performed by dental hygienists and dentists as distinct services (rather than combining them), which aligns with the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) coverage policy and regulator requirements.
- Exploring coverage for oral hygiene education, a low-cost intervention that supports long term self-management and disease prevention.

Protecting and strengthening preventive services within the CDCP is a long-term cost avoidance strategy, not a cost increase. These recommendations focus on optimizing existing investments, not expanding eligibility or benefit breadth. Targeted enhancements to prevention improve health outcomes, limit downstream expenditures, and maximize the fiscal and social return on an investment Canadians already strongly support.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: That the federal government embed oral health within existing pan-Canadian health workforce planning priorities and initiatives to ensure that federal investments in oral health affordability and access are sustainable, efficient, and supported by a workforce capable of meeting current and future demand.**

Meeting the health care needs of today’s population while preparing for tomorrow starts with understanding—and investing in—the workforce that delivers health care, including oral health care. That means ensuring the full health workforce can be effectively seen, supported, and planned for with data and key insights.

To meet current and future oral health needs for all people across Canada, the federal government should embed oral health within its broader health workforce planning, data, and policy initiatives. Without reliable workforce data and planning, federal investments that continue to improve the affordability and accessibility of oral health care may fail to achieve intended outcomes, face delivery bottlenecks, or require costly corrective measures in the future.

Embedding oral health within existing pan-Canadian health workforce planning frameworks is not an unnecessary expansion—it is a risk mitigation and value protection strategy that supports long-term sustainability and ongoing viability of current investments.

The oral health workforce, including dental hygienists, must be explicitly included in these efforts to ensure workforce planning reflects a connected, data-driven, resilient, and responsive health care system that accounts for how care is delivered today, and how it must evolve to meet future demands.

**Priority Areas for Integration:**

- Long-term trends, forecasts, and analysis to guide planning on workforce supply, distribution, and capacity at the national, provincial, and regional levels.
- Advancement of innovative, team-based models of care, including oral health providers as part of well-connected interprofessional teams working together to support a patient/client’s health care goals, needs, and preferences.
- Strategic workforce planning that supports prevention, integration with primary care, and service delivery closer to home.
- Greater integration of oral health with primary care, long-term care, public health, and community-based services.
- Sharing of practical and innovative workforce approaches across jurisdictions.
- Pan-Canadian solutions to improving access and efficiency across the health system, particularly in underserved and rural communities and for targeted populations.
- Improved access in rural, remote, and underserved communities, where poor access often translates into higher downstream costs.

By leveraging existing funding, data strategies, and federal-provincial-territorial workforce forums, the federal government can advance oral health across Canada. This approach supports a more inclusive, efficient health system that better meets Canadians' needs now and in the future.

Without integrated workforce planning, federal investments in oral health affordability risk underperforming. Embedding oral health within pan-Canadian workforce initiatives is a low-cost, high leverage strategy to protect existing investments, improve system efficiency, and reduce long term fiscal pressures—while aligning with broader federal health workforce objectives.

**RECOMMENDATION 3: That the federal government invest in targeted, community-based oral health infrastructure—particularly for seniors and long-term care (LTC) settings—to improve system efficiency, reduce downstream health costs, and protect the value of existing investments in oral health care.**

Canada’s population is aging rapidly, and seniors—particularly those in LTC and community settings—experience disproportionately high levels of untreated oral disease. Poor oral health in older adults is associated with higher rates of infection, malnutrition, aspiration pneumonia, avoidable emergency visits, and hospitalizations, all of which carry significant system costs.

From a fiscal perspective, the absence of appropriate, community-based oral health infrastructure creates inefficiencies by:

- delaying preventive and routine care,
- shifting care to higher cost acute settings, and
- undermining the effectiveness of federal affordability initiatives, including the Canadian Dental Care Plan.

Targeted infrastructure investments that bring oral health services closer to where seniors live and receive care reduce these pressures and support cost avoidance over time.

As the federal government and members of Parliament target infrastructure goals and approvals to strengthen Canada’s economic resilience, national independence, and rapid modernization, CDHA recommends that any health-related investments identify and address population oral health needs and support innovations to deliver better outcomes for Canadians.

By working with provinces, territories, key partners, and stakeholders, CDHA recommends investing in community-based oral health infrastructure to connect more Canadians and underserved communities to prevention-focused oral health care services in more places such as:

- Dental/oral health facilities in LTC homes
- Seniors’ community centres
- Rural/remote health hubs or community clinics
- Digital connectivity and remote monitoring technology to deliver oral health care services virtually/remotely

These investments emphasize capital efficiency by integrating oral health into multipurpose or existing community facilities rather than creating standalone systems.

These investments need not be large scale or universal to be effective. Targeted, evidence-informed infrastructure funding—leveraged alongside provincial, territorial, and community

partners—can strengthen the efficiency of existing health investments, reduce downstream costs, and position the health system to manage predictable demographic pressures more sustainably.