



# Universal Oral Health Care



Registered dental hygienists make up Canada's sixth largest regulated health profession, with over 30,000 working across the country. As experts in preventive oral health care, dental hygienists understand that many untreated yet largely preventable oral diseases place a heavy burden on Canada's health care system. Too often, Canadians seek treatment for dental pain in hospital emergency rooms. Those with untreated gum disease are at greater risk of developing serious health conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, aspiration pneumonia, and stroke.

Vulnerable populations in Canada, including seniors and the working poor, lack access to professional oral care. While we take great pride as a nation in our universal health care system, we must not forget that oral care continues to be funded largely from private insurance or out of pocket by Canadians. For people in our communities who do not have dental insurance coverage, including seniors and people with low or fixed incomes and their children, the cost of routine dental hygiene appointments to prevent disease and detect problems is a barrier to accessing oral health care.

Pre-pandemic results from public opinion polling conducted for the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association found that

- 4 in 10 Canadians do not have dental benefits. Those without coverage are most likely to be the elderly, have a lower income, or live in a rural area, Atlantic Canada or Quebec.
- 56% of Canadians over age 60 have no dental benefits coverage.
- More than 1 in 5 Canadians have not sought professional oral care in over 2 years.

In December 2019, the federal government made a commitment to study universal dental care for all Canadians. Given that seniors and low-income earners have been particularly hard hit during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is strongly recommended that the government move to create publicly funded access to oral hygiene services.

## What the Federal Government Can Do

Accelerate steps to incorporate a universal, comprehensive oral health care plan into our public health care system without delay, to achieve equitable access to oral health care for all Canadians.

