



# Increasing Access to Cost-Effective Preventive Oral Care for Indigenous Peoples



Medical transportation is the second-highest expenditure for the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Program of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (\$459.5 million), yet many conditions, including oral diseases, can be prevented through local health care service delivery.

First Nations and Inuit oral health is far worse than that of the general population. For example, dental day surgery rates for children from Indigenous communities are close to nine times higher than those for children from non-Indigenous populations. Unfortunately, preventive dental hygiene services and programs are not readily available in Indigenous communities, a situation that contributes to the development of more serious oral conditions requiring treatment in large urban centres.

Medical transportation is the second-highest expenditure (2017-2018) for the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Program of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (\$459.5 million), reflecting the high cost of flying Indigenous peoples in and out of their communities for treatment of health and oral health conditions. These expenses are of great concern to dental hygienists because many oral diseases can be prevented through cost-effective, community-based professional oral health care.

## What the Federal Government Can Do

While the federal government is to be commended for recognizing dental hygienists as service providers for the NIHB Dental Benefit Program, greater investment in preventive oral care services in Indigenous communities is urgently needed. Dental hygienists are uniquely positioned to deliver cost-effective preventive and therapeutic services, ensuring that all Indigenous peoples have equitable access to local oral health care in their communities.