

**OPENING REMARKS
Dr. Aaron Burry, CEO**



**House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance
Bill C-59: The Fall Economic Statement Implementation Act, 2023.**

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Thank you Chair and Committee. Merci président et comité. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. C'est un grand plaisir d'être ici aujourd'hui.

My name is Dr. Aaron Burry, and I am the CEO of the Canadian Dental Association. I am a practicing dentist for over 37 years and have devoted much of my career to treating vulnerable patients. CDA is the national voice of the dental professional promoting dental education, research, standards, and needs of the dental care system in Canada. CDA is working collaboratively with the provincial and territorial dental associations, or PTDA's, who represent over 25000 practicing dentists across the Country, to ensure that the Canadian Dental Care Plan, or CDCP, meets the needs of Canadians.

CDA has long advocated that oral health as an essential part of general health and should be supported by investments to improve health care in Canada. The CDCP represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make significant improvements to oral health for millions of Canadians. We must get it right from the start.

CDA has focused on being a constructive partner in the CDCP's development from the beginning. In February 2023, we published a policy paper—Bridging the Financial Gap in Dental Care—with a proposed framework. Primarily, we recommended that the CDCP works like any other dental plan. We stressed that patients should be allowed to choose their own dentist, and existing dental plans be safeguarded. The federal government must also ensure the cost of treatment is fully covered.

Many seniors will soon learn that this program may only cover a portion of the care they need. Vulnerable seniors have unique oral health needs that may not be covered under this program at launch.

Dentists are worried about the bureaucratic demands this program will place on their offices, which are already stretched due to significant staffing shortages. Dentists need this program to be administratively simple. This is critical to ensure access to care for the millions of Canadians who will be eligible over the coming months and years.

Over the past several months, the CDA and PTDA's have expressed concerns with the current program design to the federal government. A recent survey conducted of 4000 dentists across Canada confirms that 61% of dentists said they would not participate in the program. Without the support of the oral health care providers, this program will not succeed- and the millions of patients signing up for the program will not be able to find a dentist.

Today, I'd like to share with the committee three areas of concern.

First, the CDCP does not provide free dental care and many Canadians are under the impression that it does. In fact, the program only covers a portion of customary fees despite our call that the government respect established provincial and territorial fee guides. This is already causing confusion, with the burden of explaining the misunderstanding falling to dental administration staff.

Second, formal registration under CDCP or the "claim-by-claim" pathway are different from normal dental plans that other Canadians have. The issue is that they include terms and conditions that are generally not found in other

plans. What we are hearing from dentists is that the extensive terms and conditions may be too much for their clinic to take on.

And third, federal government approvals should not be a part of providing medically necessary care. The initial service schedule set to be launched in May gives people some level of services for the care they need, but not all. To get the actual care they need, CDCP patients may need to go through a preauthorization process, but this will only be available later in November. The CDCP is not consistent with other dental plans. It is a complex government program. It involves a more complex authorization process that we believe will disrupt patient care.

Our goal from the beginning is to make sure the CDCP succeeds. That is why we made recommendations on how this program needed to be designed to work for vulnerable populations. That is our focus. We want to work to reduce barriers to care, not see new ones implemented.

On a final point, as of today, there are a lot of unknowns about this program. For example, dentists don't know how Coordination of Benefits with provincial programs will work. We also don't know exactly what level of services will be preauthorized to meet patient needs.

I want to finish by thanking the committee for having us here today and listening to these concerns. We believe in the intent behind this program and want to work with the government to get it right for patients. All Canadians deserve the best oral health care possible. The program needs to be designed so that it works for patients and the dentists and staff who care for them.

Chair, members of committee, I thank you for your time today and look forward to this discussion. Merci beaucoup.