CANADIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION

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The national voice for dentistry

Platform and Policy Recommendations

The Canadian Dental Association (CDA) is the national voice for dentistry, dedicated to the promotion of optimal oral health and to the advancement and leadership of a unified profession. CDA is a federation of Canada's provincial and territorial dental associations, representing over 21,000 practising dentists from coast to coast.

COVID-19 has had a transformative impact on the health and well-being of Canadians. Despite the challenges to maintain a safe environment for patients and staff, dentists have continued to care for their patients throughout the pandemic. While the pandemic has brought to light new challenges in providing and accessing dental care, it has also underlined existing ones.

This election, CDA is making a series of recommendations to all parties and candidates on how best to support the dental profession and help Canadians achieve and maintain optimal oral health.

> *"Oral health is part of your overall health. With a healthy mouth you can eat, speak and smile in comfort, which helps you feel physically, socially and mentally well. A healthy mouth helps you enjoy life."*

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Improving Dental Coverage for Canadians

Canada has one of the best dental care systems in the world and ranks favourably on international rankings of oral health.

In Canada:

- More than half of all dental care was funded by employer-provided health plans.
- The vast majority of dental treatment is provided in a private office setting.

Nevertheless, some Canadians still face challenges in achieving and maintaining optimal oral health.

- ⅓ of Canadians do not have dental coverage
- 20% avoid seeing the dentist due to the cost involved

CDA recommends that Parliament conduct a detailed study on improving dental coverage for Canadians, within the first 12 months following the election.

CDA opposes proposals to immediately introduce new, large-scale, federal dental programs. Further study is needed to look at the best ways to fill the gap for Canadians currently without dental coverage, without disrupting the system of employer-provided dental coverage that most Canadians rely on, nor the network of private offices that provide the bulk of dental care services in Canada.

In the interim, CDA recommends an investment of $600 million over the next 5 years to maintain and expanding existing dental care programs delivered by provincial and territorial governments, particularly those targeting vulnerable populations.

Currently, most broad-based, publicly funded dental programs are run by provincial and territorial governments. Before the federal government considers any new, long-term investment in dental coverage for Canadians, it needs to take a seat at the table alongside the provinces and territories that have managed these programs for decades. An investment on this scale would see the federal government provide the same proportion of funding for these dental programs as it does for other health care services and serve as the "price of admission" to begin playing a role in improving dental coverage for Canadians.

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Oral Health in Long-Term Care Facilities

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on older Canadians, particularly seniors living in long-term care (LTC) settings.

While there was already concern about the quality of care in these facilities pre-pandemic, the tragic loss of life in LTC settings has spurred considerable discussion of the need for new, national, LTC standards.

Given the unique oral health challenges faced by seniors in LTC facilities and the importance of oral health on overall health, CDA recommends that any new national standards developed for LTC facilities include a standard relating to oral health.

Such a standard should include the following components:

- An oral health assessment by an appropriately trained and licensed health professional upon admission and annually thereafter;
- Beginning as soon as possible after admission, a referral process to a dentist for examination, diagnosis and treatment planning;
- A daily mouth care plan that is implemented by appropriately trained staff; and
- Suitable infrastructure to support the appropriate delivery of needed care by the oral health care team.

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Additional Recommendations

Supporting dental offices and access to dental care as Canada transitions to life post-COVID

Due to COVID-19, enhanced health and safety measures were quickly adopted by dental offices across Canada. As a result, there are no known cases of COVID-19 transmission between staff and patients since the onset of the pandemic.

However, these measures have made providing dental treatment more difficult and more costly for dental offices, most of which operate as small businesses.

CDA recommends:

- Continuing efforts to provide dental offices with cost-effective access to N95 respirators and nitrile gloves.
- Implementing the provisions in Budget 2021 to support dental offices that incurred significant additional costs adapting their offices for COVID-19 health and safety measures. These provisions should be modified so that they are retroactive to the start of the pandemic, and accessible to all dental offices.
- Maintaining support programs for small businesses still suffering from the economic impact of the pandemic, such as some dental offices.

This support for dental offices will help ensure that cost-effective dental care can remain accessible to Canadians.

Promoting Healthy Eating

A balanced and nutritious diet is important for oral health, a key component of overall health.

Sugar is one of the main causes of dental problems, such as dental decay, particularly in children. Dental decay itself is the most common childhood disease in Canada.

CDA recommends that front-of-package labelling regulations be put in place without delay, making it easier for the public to identify foods that are high in sugar.

CDA also recommends that legislation be put in place to restrict food and beverage marketing to children.

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