



**Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance
2019 Pre-Budget Consultations**

Presented by:
The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association

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THE CANADIAN DENTAL HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION
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Recommendations

1. The federal government improve the quality of life of Canada's seniors by providing funding support for the development of national guidelines for oral health in residential and long-term care.
2. The federal government commit to optimizing the capacity and distribution of health human resources by:
 - a. Extending the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program to dental hygiene as a means of improving access to oral health care in rural and remote communities.
 - b. Providing long-term support for the Oral Health Practitioner program, modelled after the successful Nurse Practitioner credential. This is cost-effective solution to improving the oral health of rural and remote Canadians and Indigenous peoples.

Introduction

The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) understands the importance of Canada's competitiveness. Each year, over 40 million hours are lost due to dental problems and treatment in Canada, with subsequent potential productivity losses of over \$1 billion dollars.¹ Through targeted investments in preventative care, the federal government will dramatically decrease the amount of time Canadians are missing work days for oral health-related issues.

Dental hygienists are primary oral health care professionals specializing in services related to health promotion and disease prevention strategies. There are over 29,000 dental hygienists across the country who play a critical role in the oral health of Canadians. CDHA requests to appear before the Standing Committee on Finance and urges the Committee to consider the following for inclusion in the 2019 Federal Budget.

Improving Quality of Life for Residents in Long-Term Care

Seniors are now outnumbering children for the first time in our country's history, and they're keeping their teeth longer. As the older adult segment of society grows, so too will their health and oral health care needs. Preventive oral care for seniors is often given lower priority than other treatment and care, regardless of the health care setting. Daily mouth care and professional preventive care barriers need to be addressed in order to support the overall health of our aging population. It is unacceptable that, many seniors end up in emergency departments to temporarily relieve the symptoms associated with untreated oral diseases, only to have the problem resurface because the underlying cause was never addressed.

The federal government can **improve the quality of life of Canada's seniors by ensuring the development of national guidelines for preventive oral care in residential and long-term care facilities.** These guidelines should be determined in collaboration with CDHA and the Office of the Chief Dental Officer (OCDO) and distributed as a resource by the new Ministry for Seniors.

The new Ministry of Seniors is ideally positioned to play a key leadership role in encouraging all types of seniors' facilities to establish best practices in seniors' oral and overall health. Establishing guidelines would encourage facilities to prioritize oral care and understand not only the value of preventive care, but also the steps to make it a reality.

Better Outcomes Through Enhanced Health Human Resources

There are over 29,000 registered dental hygienists working in Canada, and the profession continues to grow. While many Canadians have access to preventative dental hygiene care, others, particularly in rural and remote areas and vulnerable communities, remain

¹ Hayes A, Azarpazhooh A, Dempster L, Ravaghi V, Quiñonez C. Time loss due to dental problems and treatment in the Canadian population: analysis of a nationwide cross-sectional survey. BMC Oral Health. 2013;13:17

underserved. As a result, people with the greatest needs receive the least care and systemic health implications result from delayed treatment and the progression of disease. This has a significant impact on workplace productivity for these communities as many residents of rural and remote communities have to travel long distances and miss many days of work for oral health treatment.

Recently, significant attention has been paid to the need to change delivery of oral health services to the underserved. There is also an important dialogue underway about how to incent participation of health professionals in areas that have traditionally had difficulty attracting skilled, qualified people to provide the services needed to ensure adequate health outcomes.

CDHA has been active in developing policy solutions and championing program development to address these historical challenges. The 2019 budget offers government a chance to act, to prioritize improved oral health outcomes that will improve quality of life and Canadian competitiveness more broadly.

First, **CDHA recommends the federal government forgive a portion of student loans for registered dental hygienists who practice in rural and remote communities by extending the existing Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program that is available to doctors and nurses.**

This increased incentive for dental hygienists to provide preventive oral care to underserved groups in Canada can help reduce oral health disparities and address the oral health human resource shortages in these communities. Further, knowledge of loan forgiveness opportunities could incent people living in rural and remote communities to pursue dental hygiene education with the knowledge that they would be able to return to work in their home community with a financial advantage. This will not only help more Canadians get the health care they deserve, it will also provide much-needed support for women and reduce fiscal barriers to women's labour force participation, as dental hygiene is a female dominated profession.

Second, **CDHA recommends the federal government commits to supporting the Oral Health Practitioner program to improve the range of care that can be provided by graduates.** After years of consultation and development, CDHA has secured a commitment from the government for curriculum development of a new training program that will address significant gaps in oral health care that are extremely prevalent in rural and remote, and Indigenous communities. Similar to a nurse practitioner who provides comprehensive health care directly to patients, a multiskilled oral health practitioner can offer a broad range of services to populations in need, and, in turn, reduce oral health disparities across Canada. While curriculum development is a positive step, positions for graduates must be made available in order to reach its potential. The government should commit to further funding to ensure this initiative moves past a pilot stage and becomes a sustainable, long-term solution.

Taken together, these oral care human resources initiatives will incentivize care for underserved populations, improve oral health outcomes, and increase Canada's productivity and competitiveness.