

2021 Federal Election

We call on all federal parties to commit to help fill the gap in access to dental care experienced by Canadians. When it comes to oral health care, Canada's fight against the pandemic has exposed the weaknesses in our universal healthcare system.

The next federal government should commit to investing at least \$1 billion to support public dental/oral health programs for the 20% of Canadians who cannot afford to pay and/or suffer in pain.

Access to dental care has declined during the COVID-19 pandemic as people have lost jobs and health benefits.

Pre-pandemic, an estimated 7 million or 1-in-5 Canadians avoided visiting an oral health professional because they could not afford it. Studies have shown that people with visible dental problems and oral diseases have more difficulties finding jobs. The effects felt by people across Canada escalated with the pandemic. An Ontario woman recently told us:



Since the beginning of the pandemic I've had an infected tooth and been in pain, unable to chew on that side of my mouth. I am laid off from my job and cannot find any dental programs to help me without going into debt. I'm the mother of 5 children and desperate for help.



Too many Canadians are experiencing dental/oral pain and suffering because they can't afford basic dental care.

Oral health professionals understand that oral health conditions like gum disease and tooth decay are largely preventable and left unaddressed, typically lead to pain, infection, chewing problems and more. Having diseased teeth and gums affects overall health. Poor oral health exacerbates chronic diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular disease and respiratory disease. When it comes to improving the quality of life for residents of Long- Term Care homes, oral health needs to be addressed to support better health outcomes.

Canada's universal health care system does not include oral health care.

Many Canadians resort to hospital emergency rooms and doctors' offices for dental emergencies or dental pain-but they can't get dental treatment there. This costs Canadians millions of dollars each year.



About 1-in-3 Canadians do not have dental insurance.

This number will grow as baby boomers become seniors, and more people work in the gig economy without dental benefits. Younger workers are also finding it difficult to afford dental care. It's not fair that only people who can pay out-of-pocket or have employee benefits can afford access to preventive oral health care by visiting dental and dental hygiene offices.



Provinces/territories have some publicly-funded dental care programs, but these are not enough.

Most provinces and territories have some limited public dental programs for specific groups of people: children in low-income households, people on social assistance, and low-income seniors. But these programs have limited eligibility and coverage. There are no public dental programs in Canada for low-income working adults and families. Only 5 % of all oral healthcare spending in Canada is by the government – one of the lowest rates among developed countries. Some provinces are exploring how to expand public dental programs to fill the gaps. The pandemic has exposed the urgent need to invest in public oral health programs.

Improving access to oral health care will help build a stronger, healthier Canada. Here's what we call on the next federal government to do.

01

As an important health issue facing Canadians today, recognize that oral health is key to overall health. Fill the gap in universal healthcare. Ensure that all Canadians can get the preventive care they need to be pain-free, healthy, and well.

02

Commit to investing at least \$1 billion to support public dental/oral health programs in all provinces and territories for the 20% of Canadians who cannot afford to pay and/or suffer in pain.

03

Allocate funding to the provinces/territories on a per capita basis for programs that reflect these principles:

- **Equity** – target people in need without dental insurance to ensure that everyone has access to prevention, treatment and emergency dental care, either through an employer, private plan or the public dental plan.
- **Cost-effectiveness** – program delivery provided by qualified oral health professionals through a mixed model of public and private dental clinics.
- **Accessibility** – expanded capacity for Community Health Centres and public oral health clinics to ensure low-income and marginalized people truly get the care they need with supports such as mobile dentistry, transportation, interpretation and links to health and social services.
- **Comprehensive** – national definition of the minimum level of oral healthcare that provinces and territories must offer in public programs.

04

Working with Indigenous communities, make a commitment to address the extremely high rates of dental decay experienced by Indigenous Peoples. Tackle the geographic, language and socio-cultural barriers to care.

Our questions to all parties

01

What steps will your party take to help fill the gap in access to dental/oral health care experienced by Canadians?

02

What would you do if you were in dental pain and couldn't afford care like 20% of Canadians across the country?



Canadian Association of Public Health Dentistry
Association canadienne de la santé dentaire publique



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OOHA
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