

FEDERAL INVESTMENTS IN DENTAL CARE

State of Oral Health in Canada

Most Canadians are fortunate to enjoy good oral health. Roughly 75% of Canadians see a dentist on an annual basis, higher than comparable countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France.

Overall, approximately 67% of Canadians have dental benefits coverage to finance their dental care needs, in large part through employer-provided benefits. Additionally, 70% of those with employer-provided dental benefits indicated they would struggle to pay for their dental care needs if this coverage was disrupted.

Nevertheless, there is still work to be done to ensure that all Canadians can achieve and maintain good oral health, especially those in indigenous and rural communities. **That's why the Canadian Dental Association (CDA) has always supported efforts at all levels of government to improve the oral health of Canadians and increase access to dental care.**

Provincial and Territorial Programs

From coast to coast to coast, each of Canada's provinces and territories have existing infrastructure to support the oral health needs of their populations, particularly underserved communities and other groups such as children, seniors, persons living with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, racialized Canadians, and low-income families.

These programs vary across the country, posing unique challenges for access to care. For example:

- **Comprehensiveness:** Newfoundland has a universal access dental care program for all children aged 12 and under, but no dedicated program for seniors.
- **Coverage:** Although Quebec has a dental care program for all children under age 10, it doesn't cover preventative care such as cleanings, and restricts the type of filling material used in some circumstances, rather than allowing professional advice.



CDA is a federation of Canada's provincial and territorial dental associations, representing over 21,000 practising dentists from coast to coast to coast.

The Canadian Dental Association (CDA) is the national voice for dentistry dedicated to the promotion of optimal oral health, an essential component of general health, and to the advancement and leadership of a unified profession.

For more information, contact:

Michel Breau
Head of Advocacy and Governance
Canadian Dental Association
mbreau@cda-adc.ca
613-291-9553

Federal Investments in Dental Care

- **Cost:** In Ontario, programs reimburse less than 40% of fee guide levels for treatment, when the overhead costs of providing treatment increasingly exceeds 70%.
- **Cut-Offs:** Although Alberta has a dental care program for low-income adults, for single adults it is only available for those making less than \$16,580 annually – the equivalent of working roughly 20 hours per week at minimum wage.

In large part, many of these challenges exist because the programs are chronically underfunded – a result of them being almost exclusively financed by provincial and territorial governments.

Budget 2022 Investments in Dental Care

CDA welcomes the federal government's commitment, outlined in last month's 2022 budget, to invest \$5.3 billion over the next five years in providing access to dental care for Canadians. We look forward to collaborating closely with the federal government on ensuring these investments have maximum impact on the oral health of Canadians. For this reason, we strongly recommended that this funding flow through the existing program infrastructure at the provincial and territorial level.

It will be important to ensure that these new investments don't disrupt access to dental care for those Canadians who already have access – for example through provincial and territorial programs, or through employer-provided benefits.

Other Considerations

- **Prevention:** Beyond providing coverage for dental treatment, there are important preventative measures that can support the oral health needs of Canadians. This includes investing in public health systems and school-based dental programs that provide, for example, oral hygiene instruction, fluoride varnishes and rinses, and even sealants. Furthermore, community water fluoridation has long been recognized as a key measure to reduce dental decay, particularly among children. Unfortunately, Canada lags significantly behind the United States in the percentage of the population with access to fluoridated drinking water (73% in USA vs 45% in Canada).
- **First Nations and Inuit:** Nearly a million First Nations and Inuit are already eligible for dental coverage through the federal government's Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) program. While the NIHB compares favourably to many existing provincial and territorial programs, the population it serves still faces both financial and other barriers in achieving and maintaining good oral health and accessing dental care. This is particularly true for those living in rural and remote communities, where socioeconomic and environmental conditions can contribute to poor oral health and accessing necessary dental care facilities can be difficult. In addition to investing in the oral health needs of the broader population, CDA also encourages the federal government to review what steps it can take to invest in First Nations and Inuit oral health.



CDA is a federation of Canada's provincial and territorial dental associations, representing over 21,000 practising dentists from coast to coast to coast.

For more information, contact:

Michel Breau
 Head of Advocacy and
 Governance
 Canadian Dental Association
 mbreau@cda-adc.ca
 613-291-9553