



Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

Hon. Dr. Eric Hoskins
Minister
Health and Long-Term Care
Hepburn Block, 10th Floor
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

April 10, 2017

RE: Expanding Public Dental Services for Adults and Seniors Living with Low-Income

Dear Minister Hoskins,

Registered nurses, nurse practitioners and nursing students know the value of good oral health to a person's overall health and well-being.¹ Because we see first-hand the impact of poverty on health, we appreciate the expansion of public dental programs for low-income children as part of the province's Poverty Reduction Strategy and *Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care*.² We also congratulate your ministry for expanding the Healthy Smiles Ontario program so that an additional 70,000 children from low-income families can now access dental care.³

To further improve health and decrease poverty, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) is joining the Ontario Oral Health Alliance⁴ in asking you to expedite the expansion of public dental programs to low-income adults and seniors. The 2014 provincial budget committed to extending these programs by 2025, but this promise needs to be delivered more quickly. Evidence of the inequities in oral health and in access to oral health services is well documented, and these issues need to be urgently addressed both as consequences and causes of poverty in our province.^{5 6 7}

About 2.3 million Ontarians or 17 per cent of Ontario's population, cannot afford to visit a dentist or dental hygienist.⁸ Those suffering from pain and infection instead have to turn to more costly and less effective health services. In 2015, there were nearly 61,000 visits to emergency rooms for dental problems at a cost to the system of at least \$31 million.⁹ In 2014, there were almost 222,000 documented visits to physicians for oral health problems at a cost of \$7.5 million.¹⁰ Instead of spending this money on visits to health providers who often do not specialize in dentistry,^{11 12} these resources would be better spent on public dental services for low-income adults and seniors.

Minister, our province can and must do better. Ontario spends \$5.67 per person on dental services, the lowest per capita public sector spending on dental services of any jurisdiction in Canada. In contrast, expenditures are \$20.59 per person in Québec, \$27.67 per person in British Columbia, and \$40.95 per person in Alberta.¹³

RNAO urges you to expedite this year, the expansion of public dental programs for all ages of Ontarians living with low-income. RNAO's 2017 Ontario pre-budget submission recommends investing \$10 million to support the first phase of such a public program, allocated to maximize use of existing public investments in dental clinic infrastructure in Community Health Centres, Aboriginal Health Access Centres, and Public Health Units.¹⁴

Addressing the oral health needs of Ontarians will have physical, mental, and social benefits, and allow people to live with health, dignity, and hope. We urge you to act.

With warm regards,



Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD(hon), O.ONT
Chief Executive Officer, RNAO

Cc: Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario
Patrick Brown, Leader, Official Opposition
Andrea Horwath, Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario

References

¹ Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2008). *Oral Health: Nursing Assessment and Intervention*. Toronto: Author. <http://rnao.ca/bpg/guidelines/oral-health-nursing-assessment-and-intervention>.

² Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (2015). *Health Bulletin: Improving Access to Free Dental Care for Children and Youth*. Toronto: Author, May 29, 2015. http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/news/bulletin/2015/hb_20150529_1.aspx.

³ Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (2016). Mandate letter progress: Health and Long-Term Care. Toronto: Author, January 11, 2016. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/mandate-letter-progress-health-and-long-term-care>.

⁴ Ontario Association of Public Health Dentistry. (2016). Ontario Oral Health Alliance, <http://www.oaphd.on.ca/index.php/learn-more/adults/38--sp-783/oaphd-projects/74-ooha>.

⁵ King, A. (2012). *Oral Health--More than Just Cavities: A Report by Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health*. Toronto: Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 17. http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/oral_health/oral_health.pdf.

⁶ Sadeghi, L., Manson, H., & Quiñonez, C. (2012). *Report on Access to Dental Care and Oral Health Inequalities in Ontario*. Toronto: Public Health Ontario. http://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/eRepository/Dental_OralHealth_Inequalities_Ontario_2012.pdf.

⁷ Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (2014). *Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Vulnerable People Living in Canada*. Ottawa: Author. http://www.caahs-acss.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Access_to_Oral_Care_FINAL_REPORT_EN.pdf.

⁸ Association of Ontario Health Centres. (nd). *Take Action on Oral Health*. <http://www.aohc.org/oral-health>.

⁹ Association of Ontario Health Centres (2017). No access to dental care: Facts and figures on visits to emergency rooms and physicians for dental problems in Ontario. Toronto: Ontario Oral Health Alliance.
<https://www.oaphd.on.ca/images/stories/pdfs/2107-01-30-InformationDR-ER-UPDATE.pdf>

¹⁰ Association of Ontario Health Centres (2017.)

¹¹ Sheikh, H. (2017). Prescription from ER doctor: expand public dental programs. *Toronto Star*. February 21, 2017.
<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2017/02/21/prescription-from-er-doctor-expand-public-dental-programs.html>

¹² Smith, J. (2017). Letter: Prescription from ER doctor. *Toronto Star*, February 28, 2017.

https://www.thestar.com/opinion/letters_to_the_editors/2017/02/28/lack-of-oral-care-leads-to-needless-pain.html

¹³ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2011). *Putting Our Money Where Our Mouth Is: The Future of Dental Care in Canada*. Ottawa: Author, 36-37.

<http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2011/04/Putting%20our%20money%20where%20our%20mouth%20is.pdf>

¹⁴ Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2017). *Ontario Pre-Budget 2017: Nurses call for an Upstream Strategy*. Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. January 19, 2017.

http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/RNAO_Pre-Budget_Submission_2017.pdf