

Nova Scotia Oral Health Report | 2015

In the fall of 2014, the NSDA asked Nova Scotians about seniors' oral health care: how important is oral health care in their long-term plans, and what do they know about the dental health of family over the age of 65?

Polls show:

- *60% of Nova Scotians are not concerned with their parents' (over the age of 65) oral health*
- *98% of Nova Scotians rank their own oral health as critical or very important to themselves*
- *27% of Nova Scotians don't know how their parent (over the age of 65) feels about their own oral health*

These statistics indicate a knowledge and awareness gap between caring for your own oral health and being concerned about a family member or loved one that may no longer be able to monitor or maintain their own dental health. Nova Scotia's dentists are concerned with the oral health of our aging provincial population. This report is their call to action.

Questions Nova Scotians Should Be Asking...



Who is going to care for my oral health? Or assist me when I cannot?



Who will provide oral care for my aging parent or loved one when they cannot care for themselves?



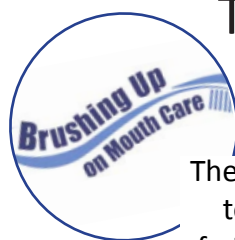
What will happen to their teeth and gums when they suffer from reduced dexterity, or age-related dementia?



About The NSDA

Established in 1891, the Nova Scotia Dental Association represents the province's dentists and advocates for the oral health of all Nova Scotians.

nsdental.org



The Brushing Up on Mouth Care Program

The Brushing Up on Mouth Care Program was created to examine the integration of oral health care for frail and dependent older adults into continuing care settings in rural Nova Scotia, Canada.

This collaboration of health care researchers and providers explored the broad-spectrum of influences on daily mouth care in long-term care, to assist in establishing a formal process for integrating oral care into organizational policy and practice.

Training resources for caregivers and long-term care facilities are free and available online for download. <http://www.ahprc.dal.ca/projects/oral-care/>



Healthyteeth.org Plus+

Healthyteeth.org is an award winning student and teacher oral health care education and awareness site. Since its launch, Healthyteeth has received over 2 million site visits from all over the world.

In 2014, Healthyteeth was renovated to add new interactive features and elements, encourage questions from all over the world, **AND the addition of a dedicated seniors site, Healthyteeth.org Plus+.**

If you can't find the answer to what you're looking for, get in touch with a local dentist with just 1-click of a button.

healthyteeth.org

Nova Scotia
2015 Oral Health Report:
Are seniors in trouble?

Nova Scotia Oral Health Report | 2015

NSDA Produced by the Nova Scotia Dental Association

Nova Scotia seniors face a looming oral health care crisis.

Nova Scotia already has one of the oldest populations in Canada, with the impending retirement of many more in the “baby boomer” generation. For those of us who aren’t yet seniors, we likely have family members who are.

Have we considered the oral health of our seniors?

Approximately one-third of Canadians over the age of 80 live in some form of long-term care. Although mouth care is an integral part of daily personal care for the independent, often it is inadequate for those who depend on others. Oral health and oral hygiene status amongst dependent older adults is frequently poor. For some, because it has been given low priority in long-term care, and for those who are independent, there can be issues with dexterity, mobility and resources to fund care. This places our senior population at risk for oral diseases and dysfunction, which greatly impact quality of life.

Aging teeth are at increased risk for gum disease, root caries (decay which often leads to tooth loss), soft-tissue lesions and significant tooth wear. A host of problems can be linked to gum disease, including respiratory issues, heart disease and diabetes. Seniors are also more susceptible to problems with dry mouth and ill-fitting dentures.

Broken or damaged teeth, abscesses, gum disease and other oral problems can lead to an inability to eat, swallow, or speak. These symptoms often go overlooked, and without proper access to care, pose a great danger.

Here is the unfortunate truth about the imminent future.

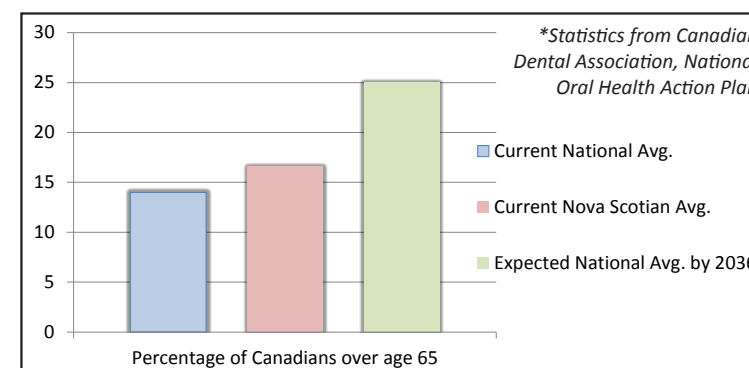
For those who care for aging parents, or are exposed to gerontology through health care work, many can tell you that oral health is overlooked.

When seniors enter into long-term or an assisted living facility (LTC), dental health records are often absent. No mandatory oral health exam is taken prior to admission, and the resident’s oral condition frequently goes unaccounted for once they move in. Decades of carefully looking after their oral health are frequently abandoned. **Nova Scotia’s dentists recognize the fact our senior population in long term care face an oral health crisis.** In a Nova Scotia Dental Association poll (n=163), 70% of dentists in Nova Scotia indicated they believe residents in LTC are not receiving adequate daily oral care. The same poll indicated LTC facilities needed improvement in the following areas: training personal care workers on the daily oral care needs of residents (95%), provision and monitoring of the residents daily oral care (83%) and provision of individual oral care kits to all residents (68%).

Facts About Nova Scotia

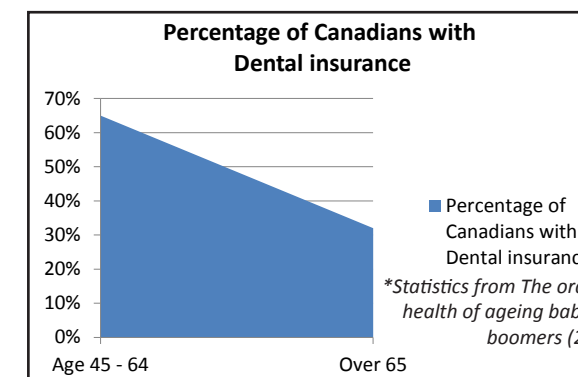
Nova Scotia has a disproportionate population of aging adults.⁴

Worldwide, the number of seniors reaching the age of 80 by 2050 is expected to quadruple to over 400 million. Canada is home to almost 5 million seniors over the age of 65, and that number is expected to surpass the number of children by 2016. Due to the aging baby boomers, and low fertility rates, this will be the first time seniors outnumber children in Canadian history.



Our aging population differs from similar seniors of the past – they have kept more of their natural teeth.²

Today’s seniors and the seniors of tomorrow have the expectation of keeping their natural teeth longer than ever before. The baby boomer generation is now entering its senior years with more natural teeth than previous generations. These natural teeth require regular care.



There is a misconception that what you cannot see cannot hurt you.

We need more emphasis on awareness of the particular oral health needs of our senior population. What are the problem signs? How can we prevent the specific oral issues facing seniors?

People with some form of dental insurance are more likely to access regular care.²

Seniors are generally less likely to have dental insurance.

What Should We Be Doing?

1. Let’s talk about oral health.

If we have family members who are seniors, it’s important to consider their oral health and what’s being done to maintain it and preserve their quality of life. Talk about it with them or their care-givers if they are no longer independent.

For those with family in long term care, consider a discussion with administration that includes:

- Implementing an oral health screening on admission;
- Requiring an annual oral exam by a dentist;
- Developing a daily mouth care plan and suitable infrastructure to support the appropriate and timely delivery of dental care.

2. Let’s train care-givers to recognize the role oral health plays in overall health.

Educating caregivers, including family members, in basic preventive oral care can improve the general health of those who can no longer care for themselves and reduce hospital admissions and health care expenses. One conservative estimate indicated that engaging one individual to offer an oral care program in each long-term care facility in the United States would save a total of about \$300 million annually by reducing the incidence of aspiration pneumonia by 10%. A similar program could lead to meaningful reduction in health care costs right here in Nova Scotia.

Helpful Hints

Did You Know?

Specialty grips can be custom made to meet the needs of individuals. Some examples include:

Rubber Bike Handle: These are easy to find and provide a better grip for those who don’t have good manual control.

Tennis Ball: This is good for those who cannot grasp the small handle of a regular toothbrush.

Long handled toothbrushes are also available to assist those who do not have full motion with their arms.

Feel free to get creative, or search Brushing Up On Mouth Care for more tips!



Resources and statistics provided by:

1. Brushing Up On Mouth Care Program, <http://www.ahprc.dal.ca/projects/oral-care/>
2. The oral health of ageing baby boomers: a comparison of adults aged 45–64 and those 65 years and older, Mary E. McNally, Debora C. Matthews, Joanne B. Clovis, Martha Brilliant and Mark J. Filiaggi
3. Canadian Dental Association, CDA Essentials Magazine Volume 1. Issue 3
4. Canadian Dental Association, National Oral Health Action Plan
5. NSDA Membership Survey, Seniors Access to Care Survey
6. Healthyteeth.org
7. Free health care? Not in Canada, Gordon Pape, Toronto Star | September 2014

