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Canadian dentists to MPs: We need answers about the Canadian Dental Care Plan

Lack of consultation with provincial and territorial dental associations is worrying

TORONTO, Oct. 26, 2023 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- There are only two months left before the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) becomes available to many more Canadians. Yet more than 25,000 dentists nationwide are in the dark about how the Government of Canada will safeguard access to dental care.

In a letter sent to Members of Parliament (MPs) this week, the presidents of provincial and territorial dental associations across the country asked how the government will:

- Safeguard employer-provided dental plans that two-thirds of Canadians currently have access to?
- Ensure that a strong federal program can be coordinated with existing provincial programs?
- Protect patient choice and maintain the patient-provider relationship?
- Ensure minimal, efficient administration that promotes timely access to care?
- Respect the costs of delivering dental care to maximize provider participation?
- Increase the number of dental assistants and dental hygienists to meet the demands of the CDCP?

Dentists want to champion a CDCP that will respect patients, providers, and taxpayers. The provincial and territorial dental associations are concerned that the CDCP has been compromised by a lack of meaningful consultation with dentists – who will be expected to deliver on the government's promises.

The CDCP is currently in final planning stages, with a potential rollout in 2024 that will attempt to increase access to uninsured Canadians under 18, people with disabilities, and seniors who have an annual family income of less than \$90,000. Dentists believe all Canadians need access to dental care. If not done properly, two-thirds of Canadians who have great employer-provided dental plans could lose their coverage and be forced into a worse plan. Costs would then skyrocket, which means the \$13 billion over five years the government set aside would not be enough to sustain the plan.

Let's take the time to get it right. We can increase access to dental care right now through an expansion of the interim measure already in place – the Canada Dental Benefit. This establishes a fixed dollar amount that a patient can use to be reimbursed for dental-related expenses.

Facts:

- Canada's provincial and territorial dental associations represent more than 25,000 licensed dentists working in more than 16,000 offices. They treat more than 30 million Canadians every year and employ at least 50,000¹ oral health care workers.
- Over 60 per cent of Canadians have a dentist they visit on a regular basis.²
- A recent survey commissioned by Health Canada found that nearly nine out of 10 Canadians are satisfied with the Canada Dental Benefit.³

Quotes:

"To succeed, this plan needs to work for both patients and providers, and to work in each province. What we are recommending is based on decades of experience and caring for the oral health needs of the more than 30 million people that come into our dental offices across the country every year." — *Dr. Bruce Yaholnitsky, President, Alberta Dental Association*

“Poorly designed programs do not improve access to care, and they leave the most vulnerable people in society behind. This is an historic opportunity, but only if the government gets it right. Dentists have the expertise, experience, and skills to know what it takes to ensure good oral and overall health.” — *Dr. Rob Wolanski, President, British Columbia Dental Association*

“As dentists we are excited to be a part of this Canadian dental care program, but there are key critical issues that need to be included for this program to be successful.” — *Dr. Scott Leckie, President, Manitoba Dental Association*

“New Brunswick dentists are already extremely busy with the recent spike in population and the backlog in demand for services related to Covid-19. This program was intended to provide dental care to the 35 per cent of Canadians who are uninsured. It needs to be easy to understand and to administer, and to be fair to all parties, including patients, dental care providers and taxpayers. Canadians need to know what benefits are being provided and which are not, before they arrive at the dental clinic.” — *Dr. Joanah Campbell, President, New Brunswick Dental Society*

“The new program must be sustainable in terms of funding, and easy to understand and access. It has to be patient-centred and work for everyone.” — *Dr. Shane Roberts, President, Newfoundland & Labrador Dental Association*

“While the CDCP has the potential to improve the lives of many Canadians, this can only be achieved if it's done right. To ensure the greatest possible outcome, we must consider all of the moving pieces and take a patient-centred approach.” — *Dr. Juli Waterbury, President, Nova Scotia Dental Association*

“The CDCP could be a game-changer for Canadians’ access to dental care. But we have one chance to get it right. Here in Ontario, we have seen that dental care programs developed without the input of dentists are doomed to fail. Just look at the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program, where waiting lists are up to two years long in some areas, and some patients have to travel ridiculously long distances to receive treatment.” — *Dr. Brock Nicolucci, President, Ontario Dental Association*

“This new program has the potential to improve access to care for many Canadians. It must be sustainable, patient-centred, and easy to access for patients. A poorly designed program will not improve access to care which is something we would like to avoid. We want this to work for Canadians.” — *Dr. Derek Thiessen, President, College of Dental Surgeons of Saskatchewan*

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¹ Canadian Institute for Health Information. Health Workforce in Canada, 2017 to 2021: Overview — Data Tables.

² Abacus Data: Survey 2023. Prepared for the Canadian Dental Association.

³ The Strategic Counsel: Canada Dental Benefit Baseline Survey (March 2023). Prepared for Health Canada.