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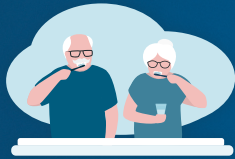
NOVA SCOTIA ORAL HEALTH REPORT

A DENTAL PRESCRIPTION FOR HEALTHCARE SYSTEM RELIEF



ORAL HEALTH AND OUR PROVINCIAL AND FEDERAL HEALTH SYSTEMS

Oral health has a direct impact on our overall health and wellbeing, with many untreated oral conditions contributing to other health problems.



A healthy mouth
means a healthy body

Sometimes an unhealthy mouth results in added pressure on our provincial health care system, with emergency room visits for toothaches and dental pain that could be avoided.

Nova Scotians benefit from some of the most comprehensive provincial government dental programs in the country, delivered both in private dental offices and in the province's hospitals. These provincial government dental programs, combined with private third-party dental plans, enable many Nova Scotians to access regular dental care and maintain good oral health. Some, however, are not so fortunate, and not all dental programs and dental plans are created equal.

Some work better than others.

Nova Scotia's dentists think that collectively, we can do better by looking at those aspects of good government policy that result in effective dental programs and healthy outcomes, relieving unnecessary stress on our province's healthcare system.

This year's NSDA Provincial Oral Health Report focuses on how we can all work together to create public policy to shape programs for Canadians, getting it right from the start, for the benefit of all.

FEDERAL INVESTMENTS IN DENTAL CARE

In 2022, Canada's federal government made a historic announcement with a pledge to provide government-insured dental care to all Canadians by 2025.

Now is the time to look closely at what aspects of good oral health public policy work for Nova Scotians and how our provincial dental programs and a new federal initiative could have the greatest impact.

OUR PROVINCE, OUR PROGRAMS

The province of Nova Scotia has its own dental programs for the people of this province, with targeted care for children up to their 15th birthday, oral surgery care, cleft palate and maxillofacial services, and dental care for those with special health needs.

THE APPROACH:

THE INGREDIENTS FOR GOOD PUBLIC ORAL HEALTH POLICY



Both provincial and federal policy should create and support better dental programs for all Canadians.

1. PRIORITIZE AND PROMOTE PREVENTION

It's always best for patients and our healthcare systems that support them if we can prevent disease instead of treating it. Oral care is no different, and government dental programs that focus on preventative care delivered by dentist-led teams result in less dental disease down the road. By identifying dental issues before they become serious, individuals are less likely to require costly emergency treatments and hospitalizations, reducing the burden on healthcare systems.

Other aspects of preventive oral care need to be considered too, for example, Fluoride is a proven tool effective at preventing dental decay. Good oral health starts at home and starts at an early age with a communication strategy

targeting parents and kids on how to best care for their teeth as they age and they will reap the benefits as they enter adulthood.

2. LEAVE THE TREATMENT DECISIONS BETWEEN THE PATIENT AND THE PROVIDER

Nova Scotians can make their own decisions in consultation with their trusted health provider, free from the constraints of ‘one-size fits all’ health program rules. Any government dental program that leaves the treatment decisions between the patient and their family dentist results in care tailored to the patient’s individual needs.

3. GOOD PUBLICLY-FUNDED PROGRAMS PROTECT EXISTING THIRD-PARTY BENEFITS AND WORK WELL FOR BOTH THE PATIENT AND THE PROVIDER

Healthy outcomes and patient-centred care should be the basis of any government dental program.

The Canadian system of employer-provided third-party dental plans has greatly benefited Canadians’ oral health, and over 60% of us coast-to-coast have access to dental care through these benefits. Government programs that protect this existing coverage will keep Canadians healthy and publicly-funded dental program budgets in line.

Dental offices are small business and operate at a significant cost. They are essential players in improving overall health for Canadians and freeing up

healthcare resources. Government dental programs need to fully fund the care that is provided. Providers and patients need to be able to understand how the government programs work, and administration needs to be seamless and uncomplicated. Good government dental programs make it easy for patients and providers to participate. The system has to work for both the patient and the dental office.

4. DENTAL CARE PROVIDERS AND ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO DELIVER CANADIAN DENTAL CARE

We're better when we work together. Federal and provincial/territorial dental programs need to put the patient first and integrate to ensure no one is left behind by programs designed to ensure everyone is included.



AN OPPORTUNITY TO DO BETTER

While the recommended approach is critical to securing a healthy oral future for Canadians, this investment and support are an opportunity for Nova Scotia to also focus on our programs and where we can do better. An overall Oral Health Strategy for Nova Scotia is required to take a closer look at our programs and evaluate them with the larger federal government's 2025 program. What are the gaps? How can we better help Nova Scotians access regular, routine care to keep them out of ERs? Can we set children and seniors up for success?

At the NSDA we work closely with all stakeholders in the dental community and are eager to work with our government and community partners to answer these questions and make access to care a reality for everyone.

PARTNERING FOR PUBLIC HEALTH SOLUTIONS

Access to oral health care for adult patients with special needs remains a significant challenge in Nova Scotia. Much of this care needs to be carried out in operating rooms by clinicians with advanced training.

Two ORs, meeting CSA standards, have been constructed in the Dalhousie University Dentistry Building. In October 2022, a million-dollar donation from an alumna allowed the Faculty of Dentistry to purchase equipment for the ORs and begin developing a program to provide adults with special needs, and pediatric patients who are currently on long waitlists at the IWK, with access to oral health care.

This project is a success for oral health care access and demonstrates what is possible when there is collaboration on good public policy for the betterment

of public health. It's a great start, but more discussions with the Nova Scotia government are needed to ensure that there is a sustainable program for these underserved and vulnerable populations.

MOVING FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NOVA SCOTIA'S DENTISTS

Work together: All levels of government, dentists, and groups supporting patient needs should have a role in shaping, and making decisions about, any government dental programs. Considering the needs of patients and the clinical advice of dental providers will make dental programs better in action.

Create dental programs that work for both the patient and the dental provider.

Focus on disease prevention: Prevention is key and a much better tool to manage oral health and overall health for everyone. Regular access to dental care can make a huge difference.

Patient-centred care: Leave the decision-making between the patient and the dental provider. Family dentists and dental specialists are the best experts to counsel patients towards best oral health.

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The Nova Scotia Dental Association (NSDA) is a member-based organization serving the needs of more than 500 dentists across the province. An important part of our mandate is to advocate for better oral health for all Nova Scotians.

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