

**Report to
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa
15 April 2019 / 15 avril 2019**

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**Submitted by
Soumis par:**

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Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE File Number: ACS2019-OPH-HPP-0005

SUBJECT: DENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR LOW-INCOME SENIORS

OBJET: SOINS DENTAIRES POUR LES PERSONNES ÂGÉES À FAIBLE REVENU

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit:

- 1. Receive, for information, a report on dental health services in Ottawa for low-income seniors; and**
- 2. Direct staff to request funding to support dental health services for low-income seniors if funding opportunities become available.**

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa :

1. **prenne connaissance du rapport sur les services de soins dentaires pour les personnes âgées à faible revenu à Ottawa;**
2. **demande au personnel de demander le financement des services de soins dentaires pour les personnes âgées à faible revenu si des fonds deviennent disponibles.**

BACKGROUND

Good oral health is an integral part of overall health and wellbeing. Poor oral health can negatively affect quality of life and self-esteem and has been linked to many health conditions, such as respiratory infections, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, poor nutrition and, specifically in seniors, osteoporosis and rheumatoid arthritis¹.

Most Canadians have good oral health and are well served by the dental care delivery system². However, some groups, such as low-income seniors, have more difficulty accessing care³. Like the rest of Canada, Ottawa has an aging population. The number of people aged 65 and over is expected to increase by 44% by 2025⁴.

In Canada, socio-economic factors play an important part in oral health outcomes. An estimated 9.4% of those aged 65 and older are living on low income⁵. Assuming this proportion remains unchanged, approximately 18,000 seniors will be living on low income in Ottawa by 2025. Other than financial barriers, seniors are also more likely to have physical barriers to dental care, due to a higher rate of disability, whether physical or cognitive³.

Approximately 71% of those aged 65 and older saw a dentist in the past year⁶. Despite this, only 55% of this population have dental insurance⁶. In Ottawa, people without insurance are approximately four times more likely to access dental services only in case of an emergency, compared to those with insurance⁶. Emergency department visits for oral health reasons are also higher in people from low-income neighbourhoods⁷. The number of emergency department visits for dental conditions among people aged 65 and older have almost doubled in the course of 5 years, from 114 in 2012 to 214 in 2017⁸. Dental conditions can be treated more effectively in a dental office setting than in hospital-based settings⁹ so improved access to dental services among low-income seniors in the community is desirable.

Dental Health Services for Low Income Seniors

In 2018, the OPH Dental Information Line provided system navigation to approximately 1,500 callers related to seniors' dental care. Of these, 830 seniors were directed to the

City of Ottawa's Community and Social Services Department (CSSD) and assessed for eligibility for Ontario Works (OW), Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Essential Health and Social Supports (EHSS). If not eligible under the CSSD financial guidelines, low-income seniors are referred to OPH staff at Community Health and Resource Centre (CHRC) locations to determine if they qualify for dental services under the City's Older Adult Plan (OAP) dental program. OAP eligibility is based on having an urgent dental need, such as dental pain and/or infection, and declaring no financial ability to pay the cost at a private dental office.

Across Ontario, the level of service for OW adults varies, ranging from nothing at all, to basic extraction of teeth for pain relief. People on ODSP have access to a wider range of basic services but typically, dentures are not included in the basket of services. Other than ODSP, there is no provincial dental program for low-income adults and seniors.

In Ottawa, the dental services available under the programs listed above are mostly limited to restorations and extractions. Preventive services, such as checkups and tooth cleaning, are not covered. Callers seeking such preventive services are redirected to low-cost services at Algonquin College and La Cité Collégiale. In Ottawa, limited denture services are covered under the Community Denture Program, which is funded by the City's CSSD. Denture coverage may be available to residents who are already covered under one of the four aforementioned dental programs. To receive denture services, residents must also qualify based on dental criteria and frequency limitations of the Community Denture Program.

The City of Ottawa's Older Adult Plan provides funding for a variety of community initiatives to help seniors. Every year, OPH submits a request for funding to provide dental services. In 2019, \$156,000 in funding was approved. However, the City's OAP funding was never intended to provide ongoing program support. Residents who qualify under the OAP dental program are treated either in OPH-operated clinics or in private dental offices that will accept seniors under fee schedules that are significantly lower than customary fees. The average cost per senior client ranges from \$290 (OPH clinics) to \$716 (external providers). Ages range from 65 to 97 years. OPH has a long and strong partnership with the Ottawa Dental Society, which represents over 800 local dentists. When callers express inability to pay for services, the Society refers them to the OPH dental information line for system navigation.

In 2018, at its four dental clinics, OPH treated 892 seniors who were covered under income support programs. Dental services such as fillings and extractions were provided to treat dental emergencies, which included dental pain or infection. In addition, these

clinics provided denture services to assess need and eligibility for the Community Denture Program.

OPH oversees services provided under publicly-funded dental programs in private dental offices by processing claims and paying these offices. Patients who are eligible for services under the Community Denture Program can have denture services provided by dentists and denturists in Ottawa. OPH works closely with community dentists to treat patients with complex dental and medical conditions. The dental clinic at the Civic campus of the Ottawa Hospital can treat patients with complex medical conditions.

Community Outreach

The OPH dental outreach team consists of 3 dental hygienists who visit 14 CHRC locations every month to offer free dental screenings, provide dental health information, apply fluoride varnish, clean dentures, help clients navigate the dental system to access treatment services, and promote and enroll new clients into the various available programs.

In 2018, 578 seniors attended these sessions and 363 (63%) were identified with urgent dental needs. Of these, 177 were placed on the OAP dental program and received dental treatment. Some of the remaining clients were able to access private funding, such as family support, or were eligible under private insurance. The remaining clients were placed on a wait list, which currently stands at approximately six months due to annual budget limitations (at the end of 2018, there were 135 on the wait list). For emergency situations where service is not available in private offices, seniors are referred to OPH dental clinics for treatment of immediate needs.

Working in collaboration with public health nurses from the seniors' team, the OPH dental outreach team provides oral health presentations at Aging in Place residences in Ottawa. In these 11 residences, the dental team works with isolated seniors to increase their skills, such as daily brushing and flossing, provides denture cleaning, applies fluoride varnish, and distributes supplies such as toothbrushes, toothpaste and floss. Other services include dental screenings, system navigation, including making appointments at dental clinics, and enrolment to dental plans as appropriate.

In the four City-operated Long-Term Care homes, approximately 27% of residents are considered low-income and receive a subsidy for their monthly co-payment. Under the *Long-Term Care Homes Act*, Long-Term Care Homes are responsible for offering residents an annual dental assessment, completed by nurses, and other preventive dental services such as daily tooth brushing. Payment for services is the responsibility

of the resident or the resident's family. To facilitate access to dental services for residents, three of the City's long-term care homes have a contract with a mobile dental service (currently Golden Care Dental Care Services) and one home has a separate agreement with another dental provider. Because of residents' complex needs, dental services that are offered in the homes are preferred. In general, services are for pain relief, tooth cleaning, restorations and treatment of infection.

DISCUSSION

Recommendation 1: Receive, for information, a report on dental health services in Ottawa for low-income seniors.

This report provides an overview of the dental health services currently available in Ottawa for low-income seniors and the need for same, which is provided for information.

Recommendation 2: Direct staff to request funding from the Province to support dental health services for low-income seniors, if such funding becomes available.

During the 2018 provincial election campaign, the Progressive Conservative Party promised to implement a new dental program for low-income seniors. Specifically, they committed to investing \$98 million annually in a new Dental Care Program for Low-Income Seniors that would assist an estimated 100,000 low-income seniors, based on the low-income threshold for the Ontario Drug Benefit. Using these guidelines, a single senior with an income of \$19,399 or less, or a couple with a combined income of \$32,300 or less would qualify. This threshold would allow most of the low-income seniors in Ottawa to have access dental care under the new program.

Though there have been no announcements related to this issue since the provincial election, many Boards of Health across Ontario have sent letters to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care to express their support for the development of a provincial dental program.

To position Ottawa to be able to take advantage of any funding that may become available, OPH undertook community consultations to understand the needs of low-income seniors in Ottawa who face challenges in obtaining dental care. This included focus groups with seniors who would qualify under the financial limits and with various stakeholders working with seniors, such as Community Health and Resource Centres, the Council on Aging, the City's Director of Long-Term Care, the Ottawa Dental Society and others.

The stakeholders unanimously support OPH increasing access to dental care services

for low-income seniors. Stakeholders felt there are clear benefits to offering this type of program and support OPH's leadership in furthering this initiative. They were unified in their views regarding the impact of unmet dental care among the senior population in Ottawa, and the benefits to be gained from the proposed program. "You have seniors who have dental problems that are painful, debilitating, but they just can't afford to get any treatment until it gets to an emergency where they can be treated in hospital", said one participant. Most favour including maintenance care and pain relief in a dental program for seniors. However, views are mixed as to the value of covering denture services as a priority as "rationing" of services will likely be required within any program.

If funding becomes available, OPH would apply for base funding to provide dental care to seniors who qualify under the new program. This funding would be used to increase dental treatment capacity for seniors in both private and OPH clinics. OPH would provide system navigation to assist seniors on how to apply for dental programs, to help them enroll and to find a dentist to provide the required services. Outreach services offered in community locations such as Community Health Centres and Aging in Place residences would continue to provide oral health education to increase seniors' understanding of dental disease and to increase self-care through daily oral health habits, and preventive services such as topical fluoride applications and denture cleanings.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no rural implications associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

Community consultation was completed in March 2019 to understand the needs of low-income seniors who face challenges in obtaining dental care.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to receiving the information contained in this report and in implementing recommendation 2.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1 – Dental Programs for Low-Income Seniors

DISPOSITION

Should Provincial funding be announced to support dental health services for low-income seniors, OPH would submit a request pursuant to the Board's approval of recommendation 2 of this report.

Document 1: Dental Programs for Low-Income Seniors

Program	Eligibility	Services	Location
Essential Health and Social Supports (EHSS)	Must meet the financial eligibility for EHSS (CSSD)	Emergency exams, fillings, extractions, denture services	OPH clinic
Ontario Works (OW)	Must be eligible for OW	Emergency exam, treatment for pain, infections, fillings, extractions, denture services	OPH clinic
Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)	Must be eligible for ODSP	Basic level services, checkups, tooth cleaning, fillings, extractions, dentures.	Private offices that accept the lower fees paid
Older Adult Program – limited funding available	Dental urgent need, not on social assistance, financial inability to pay for treatment.	Emergency exam, treatment of pain, infections, fillings, extractions, denture services	OPH clinic, a few private offices that accept referrals

¹ Oral Health – More Than Just Cavities. A Report by Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health. April 2012. Available from http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/oral_health/oral_health.pdf. [Cited March 15, 2019]

² Health Canada. Report on the Findings of the Oral Health Component of the Canadian Health Measures Survey 2007-2009. Available from http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2010/sc-hc/H34-221-2010-eng.pdf. [Cited March 15, 2019]

³ Canadian Dental Association. Position Paper on Access to Oral Health Care for Canadians. Available from http://www.cda-adc.ca/files/position_statements/accesstocarepaper.pdf. [Cited March 15, 2019]

⁴ Population Projections. Ottawa. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, IntelliHEALTH Ontario. Extracted Jun 06, 2018

⁵ Prevalence of low income based on the Low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT). Statistics Canada. 2017. Ottawa, CV [Census subdivision], Ontario and Ottawa, CDR [Census division], Ontario (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed February 11, 2019).

⁶ Canadian Community Health Survey 2017, Statistics Canada, Share File, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

⁷ Singhal S, McLaren L, Quinonez C. Trends in emergency department visits for non-traumatic dental conditions in Ontario from 2006 to 2014. *Can J Public Health* 2017;108(3):e246–e250 doi: 10.17269/CJPH.108.5950

⁸ National Ambulatory Care Reporting System 2012-2017, IntelliHEALTH ONTARIO, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Date Extracted: Feb 2019.

⁹ Allareddy V, Rampa S, Lee MK, Allareddy V, Nalliah RP. Hospital-based emergency department visits involving dental conditions: Profile and predictors of poor outcomes and resource utilization. *J Am Dent Assoc* 2014;145(4):331–37. PMID: 24686965. doi: 10.14219/jada.2014.7.