

## MEDIA RELEASE: Canada's Provincial and Territorial Dental Associations

### Federal government needs to clear up confusion about Canadian Dental Care Plan

#### *The CDCP isn't free from cost and red tape*

February 8, 2024 – Dentists know that the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) is a major opportunity to provide oral health care to millions of people who have been unable to access the care they need. However, seniors and other eligible Canadian residents signing up for CDCP are going to be surprised when they find out their care won't be free. They might also be unaware they might have to change dentists or try to find a new one.

Dentists are also unclear about what they're being asked to sign up for and they don't know how to answer questions about the federal government's plan.

Now that more details of the CDCP have been released, it's time for the federal government to answer the big questions Canadians have. Patients will be surprised to know:

1. *Am I getting free dental care?* No – patients may pay out-of-pocket for services and fees that aren't covered under the federal government's new dental benefits plan, including 40 to 60 per cent co-payments for families who earn more than \$70,000 per year. Where government reimbursement does not cover the full cost of care, some patients will pay the balance.
2. *Can I choose my own dentist?* Maybe not – patients will have to search for dentists who agree to participate, despite the unclear terms and conditions set by the government.
3. *Will it be easy to get the care I need?* Maybe not – dentists expect there will be a lot of red tape that may delay care and not make this a smooth process. Unlike other dental benefits programs, the CDCP has inserted processes that get in the way of how patients can access essential oral health care, and the relationship they have with their dentist.

The federal government has not answered other critical questions: How will they protect existing work, school and/or group dental benefits? How will the CDCP work with other publicly funded dental programs, including provincial programs? Without addressing these legitimate concerns, how do they expect people to know what this will mean for their dental coverage and what they should do next?

Based on what the government has announced about the CDCP, the dental associations don't know if dentists will choose to participate in the CDCP. How can dentists provide informed consent and agree to participate in the CDCP without answers to their questions? We understand that many general practitioners and dental specialists have already decided not to participate.

Health Canada has rushed out a massive program under unreasonable timelines. While dentists were consulted and provided advice on building a sustainable dental program, it was at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour for the provincial and territorial dental associations across Canada and we still see major gaps and flaws that have yet to be addressed.

As experts in oral health care, the dental associations, representing over 25,000 dentists across the country, have pointed out that the CDCP does not meet most of the principles of [A Proposed Framework for the Canadian Dental Care Plan](#). This is an historic investment, so it is critical that the federal government truly gets it right.

#### Quotes

"Dentists and taxpayers alike need the government to address the gaps we have identified and questions we have raised. I don't want any patients to be taken by surprise when they come to my practice. It's not dentists' fault that the program doesn't meet the promises the federal government has made to Canadians." – *Dr. Jenny Doerksen, President, Alberta Dental Association*

"Given the proven relationship between oral and general health, this plan is an unprecedented opportunity to improve the overall health of Canadians. However, as a dentist who cares deeply for my patients, I'm extremely concerned about the government's lack of clarity and collaboration in this plan. Without clear information, dentists cannot make an informed decision on whether or not to participate. This plan cannot succeed if it is carried on the backs of oral healthcare providers; it must be sustainable for patients, dentists, and taxpayers." – *Dr. Rob Wolanski, President, BC Dental Association*



"The federal government has the responsibility to create a plan that supports and enriches the systems currently in place. There is a window of opportunity to make the necessary changes to ensure access to quality oral health care for all Canadians and we implore the government to take action. In 20 years, the makers of the CDCP may have moved on, but many of us will continue to practice dentistry. We look forward to a future where the quality and access to care improves over time, not worsens." – *Dr. Daron Baxter, President, Manitoba Dental Association*

"New Brunswick dentists care deeply about our patients. We know that dental care can be costly. This plan has followed the design of the federal NIHB program, which is not well respected by dentists across our province. That plan imposes a lot of administrative burden on dental clinics, is not easy to access or administer, and does not cover the full costs of providing treatment. As a result, many dentists do not participate in the NIHB plan and I fear they won't be able to participate in this program either. It is important that patients receive simple, clear messaging from Health Canada and that patients maintain the right to choose their own dentist. New Brunswick dental clinics are already extremely busy and are experiencing shortages of labour. The CDCP should be easy to use and administer, should cover all treatments needed and should cover the full costs of those treatments." – *Dr. Joanah Campbell, President, New Brunswick Dental Society*

"The federal government needs to clearly explain what this program really is, and what it is not, so that patients can make informed decisions about their care. We are always supportive of increased access to oral health care, but it must be done right. This plan has to be sustainable for patients, dentists and the government and in our opinion, it is not at this time." – *Dr. Shane Roberts, President, Newfoundland and Labrador Dental Association*

"The federal government has launched a program that is rushed and says that these issues will be resolved later. There is a long history of poorly structured and funded government dental programs in some jurisdictions. I'm concerned about whether the government will fix the problems with the CDCP or existing plans any time soon, if ever." – *Dr. Steven Partyka, President, Northwest Territories & Nunavut Dental Association*

"Canadians need to be told how, exactly, the CDCP will work alongside the many existing provincial and territorial programs. This clarification would go a long way towards making sure patients feel comfortable seeking dental treatment when they need it." – *Dr. Juli Waterbury, President, Nova Scotia Dental Association*

"This program is just not ready to go yet. While we appreciate that Minister of Health Mark Holland and his officials finally sat down with us, it hasn't been a negotiation, just a discussion. A program without patient autonomy, an unrealistic expectation that care will be free, and with a bunch of red tape that stands in the way of care isn't nearly enough progress." – *Dr. Brock Nicolucci, President, Ontario Dental Association*

"The CDCP had the potential to benefit millions of Canadians and required thoughtful planning and smooth implementation. Developing a national oral health plan is a monumental task that should include all stakeholders rather than a process without meaningful consultation of the provincial and territorial dental associations. Unfortunately, the need to meet seemingly unrealistic deadlines has won out over sound policy, resulting in a program that does not live up to the promises made by the federal government." – *Dr. Matt Shaffner, President, Dental Association of Prince Edward Island*

"The College of Dental Surgeons of Saskatchewan applauds the initiative of the Federal Government to increase access to oral health care for Canadians. Unfortunately, dentists remain in the dark on specific details of the plan, and how the plan will affect their patients, staff, and businesses. Registrants should wait for further details about the CDCP to be released, so they are able to make a properly informed decision whether to register." – *Dr. Derek Thiessen, President, College of Dental Surgeons of Saskatchewan*

"The YDA welcomes all initiatives to bring accessible dental care to our community, however the federal government needs to ensure that the new CDCP will work with and not against existing territorial dental programs such as the Yukon Dental Program that was launched last year. We welcome further conversation in integrating the CDCP within the wider framework to ensure existing programs are not disrupted." – *Dr. Kenny Liu, President, Yukon Dental Association*

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