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## Media Release

### **Universal Children’s Day: Dental Hygienists Support the Right to Good Oral Health**

November 18, 2014 (Ottawa, ON) – On November 20, dental hygienists across Canada will celebrate Universal Children’s Day and reconfirm their commitment to promoting and protecting children’s rights, including the right to good oral and overall health, education, and freedom from harm.

While much progress has been made in the 60 years since Universal Children’s Day was first proclaimed, many children continue to experience neglect and abuse, and many still suffer from preventable diseases, both in Canada and abroad.

Nowhere is this suffering more acute than among Canada’s children living in rural and remote communities. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, day surgery rates for the treatment of early childhood tooth decay—a highly preventable disease—are more than 8 times higher in regions with a large proportion of Aboriginal residents, and more than 3 times higher in rural areas of the country. Given that optimal oral health is the cornerstone of overall physical, social, and mental well-being, disease prevention programs will benefit not only Canada’s children, but society as a whole. As Mandy Hayre, president of the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA), explains, “Canadian oral health care policies that fail to take into account the rights of children affect the future of the nation.” She adds, “Governments must work together to implement children’s oral health programs that focus on disease prevention and education, as well as improving access to care for all. The right to good oral health applies equally to the youngest and most vulnerable among us.”

While Canadian policy makers have an obligation to support children’s universal rights, parents and guardians at home have a role to play too. It is clear that children’s earliest experiences influence their future development, so parents and guardians must help to instill good oral hygiene habits from the beginning. Help your children to brush twice a day for two minutes and to clean between their teeth. Promote healthy food choices and the use of fluoride, keep sugary treats to a minimum, and arrange regular dental visits for your children, from the age of one. Working together, government leaders, primary health care providers like dental hygienists, and family caregivers will give all of our children something to smile about!

Serving the profession since 1963, CDHA is the collective national voice of more than 26,800 registered dental hygienists working in Canada, directly representing 17,000 individual members including dental hygienists and students. Dental hygiene is the 6th largest registered health profession in Canada with professionals working in a variety of settings, including independent practice, with people of all ages, addressing issues related to oral health. For more information on oral health, visit: [www.dentalhygienecanada.ca](http://www.dentalhygienecanada.ca).

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