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Media Release

Dental Hygienists Work to Improve Children's Oral Health in Canada's North

November 16, 2015 (Ottawa, ON) – On November 20, Canada's dental hygienists will celebrate Universal Children's Day by reminding us all of the need to improve access to high-quality preventive oral health care in this country. The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) strongly believes that all Canadians, including children, should have access to timely oral health care by the right provider, in the right place, and at the right time.

First proclaimed by the United Nations in 1954, Universal Children's Day is a time for people around the world to reconfirm their commitment to protecting and promoting children's rights, including the right to the "highest attainable standard of health," access to facilities for treatment and rehabilitation, and preventive care (*UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 24*). While much progress has been made over the years, many children in Canada continue to suffer from preventable diseases because they lack access to essential health care services. Nowhere is this suffering more acute than among children living in rural and remote communities.

As CDHA president Donna Scott explains, "Day surgery rates for the treatment of early childhood tooth decay—a highly preventable disease—are more than 3 times higher in rural areas of the country and more than 8 times higher in regions with a large proportion of Indigenous residents, like Nunavut and the Northwest Territories." In an effort to address this inequity, CDHA has partnered with the Government of Nunavut to provide on-site preventive and therapeutic dental hygiene services to all children between the ages of 0 and 7 residing in 19 Nunavut communities. Preliminary data from the project show that the work of dental hygienists in the North is helping to alleviate the needless pain and suffering experienced by these children.

While primary health care providers like dental hygienists are working to improve the oral health of Canada's youngest and most vulnerable citizens, parents and guardians at home have a role to play too. It is extremely important to instill good oral hygiene habits in your children 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 and juices to a minimum, and arrange regular dental visits for your children once the first tooth erupts. Scott adds, "Good oral hygiene

coupled with timely access to preventive dental hygiene services 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 17,500 individual members including dental hygienists and students. Dental hygiene is the sixth largest registered health profession in Canada with professionals working in a variety of settings, including independent dental hygiene practice, with people of all ages, addressing issues related to oral health. For more information on oral health, visit: www.dentalhygienecanada.ca.

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