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Media Release

Dental Hygienists Call for Federal Leadership to Support Taxpayers and Improve Oral Care Outcomes

August 19, 2015 (Ottawa, ON) — Canada’s dental hygienists call on all federal parties to commit to addressing the costly issue of limited access to preventive oral care in Canada. The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) says that inadequate government supports for dental treatment and oral care, particularly for First Nations and Inuit peoples as well as Canadian seniors, have created inequities in the oral health system and jeopardized the physical and economic health of this country.

Canadians today cover 94% of their own oral health care costs. Government programs cover only the remaining 6%. People who don’t qualify for government supports or lack dental insurance coverage are left to pay out of pocket, which for many is a significant barrier that ends up costing all taxpayers greatly. “When oral health issues are left untreated, they may progress to more serious conditions, resulting in lost workdays and more expensive treatments,” notes Mandy Hayre, President of CDHA. “Improving access to care will help the government and the public save money in the long term while increasing productivity and providing better oral health outcomes for more Canadians.”

CDHA advocates investments in oral health promotion and disease prevention strategies for populations under federal jurisdiction, as well as legislative changes that will bring care to people rather than people to care. For First Nations and Inuit peoples in particular, costly medical travel bills would be greatly reduced by improving local access to dental hygiene services through the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program. Another key CDHA recommendation is for collaboration between the federal and provincial/territorial governments to ensure that long-term care and homecare standards include daily mouth care and professional oral health care services for Canada’s seniors.

People between the ages of 60 and 79 are 40% less likely to have private dental insurance compared to the general population, and few jurisdictions have programs in place to address this situation.

“Dental hygienists are primary health care providers who specialize in clinical assessments, preventive therapies, and oral health education,” adds Hayre. “During this federal election campaign, we invite all national party leaders to tell Canadians how they plan to improve access to preventive oral care—the most effective care—so that everyone, young or old, rich or poor, can enjoy the benefits of good oral health.”

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 practice, with people of all ages, addressing issues related to oral health. For more information on oral health, visit

www.dentalhygienecanada.ca/Accessstocare

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