Windsor-Essex County Health Unit Board of Health

RECOMMENDATION/RESOLUTION REPORT – Strengthening Coordination of Provincial and Federal Dental Programs

2025-09-18

BACKGROUND

The Province of Ontario has long supported the oral health needs of those who meet high priority income or age-related thresholds. Through the delivery of the provincial *Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO)* program the WECHU has connected thousands of children to barrier and cost-free oral health treatment and has set the course for healthier overall growth and development into adulthood. In addition, provincial social service programs like *Ontario Works (OW)* and *Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)* which are managed through Ontario municipalities have provided certain basic services or emergency treatment for those who qualify.

The *Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP)* is a federal program launched in late 2023 to improve access to dental care for eligible Canadians who do not have private dental insurance and meet income-based eligibility criteria. With the introduction of the CDCP, service providers began working with clients to coordinate the application of the new federal program with the existing provincial programs and the Province of Ontario has released resources to support the complex nature of coordination. Accordingly, the province requires that in any situation involving concurrent eligibility of provincial programs and the federal (CDCP) program, the CDCP will serve as the **primary payer** and that any provincial program will serve as the **secondary payer.**

While the pathways and interactions have been communicated to service providers and the public, there are opportunities to further improve coordination and communication to reduce access barriers.

Resulting from the direction around primary and secondary payer private dental offices have reported to social service providers and public health that they are unable to see clients under the provincial programs (i.e., HSO, OW, ODSP) until such time that the client is enrolled in CDCP. This presents a challenge to those who have yet to be enrolled in CDCP and require urgent oral health treatment. This specifically impacts:

- those who have applied to CDCP and have yet to be approved
- those who are unable to apply as they have not filed a tax return in the previous year, including those who are unhoused or underhoused
- those who have just learned about CDCP but have not yet enrolled
- those who are asylum seekers or have recently moved to Canada

Under these circumstances, it is likely that those most in need (e.g., new Canadians, individuals who are underemployed or underhoused) will continue to lack access to urgent oral health treatment, and in some cases, have less timely access than they would have prior to the implementation of the CDCP.

PROPOSED MOTION

Whereas, oral health is a critical component of overall health and well-being, and access to dental care remains a significant barrier for many low-income individuals and families in Windsor-Essex and across Ontario; and

Whereas, the Government of Canada has launched the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) to expand access to dental services for uninsured Canadians with low and middle incomes; and

Whereas, the Province of Ontario administers several dental and social assistance programs, including Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO), the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), and Ontario Works (OW), which also provide dental benefits to eligible populations; and

Whereas, the current coordination of benefits between the CDCP and Ontario's programs is evolving, and clear, consistent, and integrated processes are essential to avoid duplication, ensure continuity of care, and reduce confusion for clients and providers; and

Whereas, local public health units, including the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, play a vital role in delivering oral health services and supporting vulnerable populations;

> **Now therefore be it resolved** that the Board of Health for the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit urges all levels of government to continue to improve the coordination between CDCP and Ontario's dental and social assistance programs to ensure seamless access to oral health treatment when needed; and
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> **FURTHER THAT**, the Province of Ontario provide clear guidance and streamlined administrative processes to social service organizations, oral health providers, and other healthcare providers to support navigation of the available support programs and eliminates delays in accessing oral health care; and
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> **FURTHER THAT**, the Province of Ontario provide a time-limited exemption which temporally waives the requirement to utilize CDCP as the primary payer for emergency dental treatment for those who are not currently enrolled in the program until such time that enrollment can occur; and
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> **FURTHER THAT**, the Government of Canada and Province of Ontario provide additional support to social services to ensure those experiencing homelessness or who may have experienced challenges in filing tax returns are able to do so and in so doing become eligible for oral health services and a multitude of other social supports; and