

**Report to
Rapport au:**

**Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa
17 April 2023 / 17 avril 2023**

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**Submitted by
Soumis par:**

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Ward: CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE File Number: ACS2023-OPH-HPP-0001

SUBJECT: Update on Ottawa Public Health's Dental Health Services Program

OBJET: Mise à jour sur le programme de services de santé dentaire de Santé publique Ottawa

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit receive this report for information.

RECOMMANDATION DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la Ville d'Ottawa prenne connaissance de ce rapport à titre d'information.

BACKGROUND

Oral Health and the Ontario Public Health Standards

In Ontario, the Oral Health Protocol¹, under the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS)², provides direction to public health units on oral health services and highlights oral screening, assessment, and surveillance as core services, including the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program and Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program.

Public Health Implications of Poor Oral Health

Oral health is linked to overall wellbeing and quality of life³. Untreated oral diseases can lead to serious health conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cerebrovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, cognitive decline, certain cancers, and pneumonia⁴. Dental disease can also affect learning, employment, and social life⁵.

Canadians' oral health has improved in the past 30 years, yet some groups still lack access to dental services and suffer from more dental health problems. In Canada, it is estimated that 2.26 million school days and 4.15 million working days are missed due to dental related illness⁶. Financial barriers are the most prevalent, as almost half of those without insurance list cost as a reason they avoid going to the dentist⁷.

In Ottawa, 72% of the population have dental insurance, however among people living in the lowest income quintile, approximately 50% or 83,600 individuals are without dental insurance⁸. People without insurance are less likely to have visited a dentist in the past year (62% versus 85% with insurance) and are more than three times as likely to seek dental care only in emergencies (21% versus 6% with insurance)⁹. Indigenous populations in Canada continue to face significant barriers caused by the historic effects of colonialism and systemic racism in the Canadian health care system, including for dental care. Inuit and First Nations people have nearly twice as much dental disease as other Canadians¹⁰. Research indicates that a large portion of Indigenous people, 28%, wait to go to the dentist until the situation is an emergency⁷. Many factors, including fewer regular dental visits, less access to affordable and nutritious food, and geographic barriers are linked to this poorer oral health¹¹.

Ottawa Public Health Dental Health Clinics

Since the 1970's, public health and social services in Ottawa have worked together to ensure access to dental treatment services for low-income residents. The original dental clinics were funded through the city and operated by public health. Since then, various provincially funded dental programs have provided operational support for the clinics.

OPH also works with private dental offices in the community to increase access to service and provides referrals to specialist level treatment and denture services as required. Through the city commitment and public health initiative, this historical dedication to dental care access established a successful model of dental programs and services.

OPH provides direct dental care to residents through 4 dental clinics, which are in some of Ottawa's priority neighbourhoods (see Document 1). In 2022, the client profile of dental visits to our clinics was 26% child/youth; 44% adults; and 30% seniors. Further in 2022, 12,632 dental visits were completed in OPH clinics, providing care to 5,444 unique clients. These visits involved the following services: 7,276 assessments; 7,055 preventive services; 2,772 extractions, and 3,997 fillings.

In 2016, OPH opened a clinic located in the Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health in partnership with Wabano. This clinic provides treatment and preventive services in a way that respects Indigenous values, language, knowledge, and culture. In 2022, the clinic had a client base of approximately 2,000 unique clients who are First Nation, Inuit and Metis. OPH dental staff partner with various Indigenous agencies such as the Innuqatigiit Centre for Inuit Children; Makonsag Aboriginal Headstart; Tungasuvvingat Inuit and Akausivik Inuit Family Health Team, Centre des étudiant autochtones, Mamidosewin, Mashkawaziwogamig Indigenous Resource Centre to promote oral health and access to this clinic.

See Document 2 for a list of all dental programs with which OPH engages and works.

Publicly Funded Dental Programs by Age

Children

Ontario's Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program provides preventive, routine and emergency dental services for children aged 17 years and under from low-income households. Families eligible for Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) have their children automatically enrolled. Children not on social assistance who meet the eligibility guidelines can also be enrolled. HSO is cost-shared 70% provincial and 30% municipal funding. Treatment is provided in private dental offices that accept this program and is billed through the HSO insurance administrator directly. OPH receives base funding to provide HSO treatment in our clinics. In 2022, children and youth represented 26% of all OPH dental clinic visits. Treatment provided included dental assessments, extractions, fillings, and preventive services.

In addition, OPH collaborates with the local Children's Aid Society (CAS). Treatment is done in private dental offices and OPH reviews and approves the dental claims for

reimbursement and provides CAS with information to ensure wards of the court are having routine dental checkups and treatment as required.

Adults

OPH provides emergency dental services to adults receiving social assistance, as requested by the City's Community and Social Services Department (CSSD). Services available under these programs are mostly limited to fillings and extractions. Preventive services, such as checkups and cleanings, are not covered. People seeking preventive services are redirected to low-cost services at Algonquin College and La Cité Collégiale. In 2022, adults represented 44% of all dental visits at OPH dental clinics. Services provided were dental assessments, fillings, extractions, and dentures.

Seniors

In 2019, the Ontario government launched the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP), a 100% provincially funded program for low-income seniors who are 65 years of age or older and who meet the income eligibility criteria¹². At the launch of the program, the anticipated number of eligible seniors in Ottawa was 12,000, with an expected uptake of 41%. Based on the latest Ministry program update, approximately 5,000 seniors (42%) are enrolled under OSDCP in Ottawa. To increase uptake of this program, OPH works with partners such as Community and Social Services Department, 3-1-1, Community Health and Resource Centres and outreach activities at Aging in Place buildings and HUBs to help clients enrol in the program. Services covered include dental check-ups, tooth cleaning, treatment of gum and bone diseases, fillings, extractions, and dentures.

In 2022, seniors represented 30% of patient visits in OPH clinics. On a case-by-case basis, OPH works in collaboration with community dentists who accept the program. Services covered include dental check-ups, tooth cleaning, treatment of gum and bone diseases, fillings, extractions, and dentures.

Prevention, Promotion, Surveillance and Screening

Working with all four publicly funded school boards, OPH undertakes oral screenings in elementary schools to identify children with oral pain, infection and/or open tooth decay. All kindergarten and Grade 2 students are screened. For schools with higher levels of dental disease, grades 4 and 7 students are also screened. In all, 16,630 school-based dental screenings were provided from September to December 2022, with urgent dental needs being identified in 2,165 children (10%). OPH supports parents to ensure children access dental treatment either through their private dental insurance or through the Healthy Smiles Ontario program.

Further, to identify and treat problems at an earlier stage, in areas with higher levels of dental health problems, OPH screens young children in childcare centres. In 2019, 48 daycares were screened in high priority neighbourhoods, with 1,513 screenings performed and findings of 6% needing urgent dental care. This activity was paused in 2020 due to COVID and is restarting in April 2023. 54 childcare centres have been approached to resume the service.

Pre-pandemic, OPH was onsite at Community Health and Resource Centres (CHRC) each month to provide dental visits for their clients. Services offered include system navigation, denture cleaning, limited preventive services such as fluoride varnish applications and oral health education. This activity was paused during the pandemic and restarted in 2022 to provide system navigation to assist clients in accessing dental treatment. In 2022, onsite visits ceased at these locations and moved to the Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs. OPH will monitor the uptake of dental services at the Hubs versus the CHRC locations.

OPH works with the broader community on health promotion activities such as regular updates to health promotion materials shared with partners; dental focus days on Parenting in Ottawa Facebook pages with weekly blitz activities in April for Oral Health Month; distribution of dental supplies such as toothbrushes and floss and engagement with other OPH and Community and Social Services Department teams to further promote oral health with their clients.

DISCUSSION

COVID-19 Pandemic and Oral Health Impacts

The dental health needs in the community are expected to be higher than ever and to continue long term. OPH has only so much capacity to provide clinical and preventive services and there are barriers to treatment in the community, including general dentists experiencing patient backlogs and not accepting patients covered under publicly funded plans, and limited capacity for referrals to dental specialists and hospital based dental services. New capacity will come online through additional clinic expansion, and we continue to work with local dental partners to accept patients under these programs. In the meantime, we are working to increase screening and promotion of publicly funded programs to increase the uptake of programs. We will continue to monitor capacity against need and apply a priority neighbourhood lens.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many barriers for Canadians in accessing dental care. OPH's clinical services were disrupted, resulting in significant backlogs.

Hospital emergency room visits related to non-traumatic dental needs that could have been managed in a community dental clinic increased from 1,435 visits in 2016 to 1,726 in 2021. Disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in backlogs in access to dental care and a pause in school and community oral health services.

As of March 2020, due to the risks associated with COVID-19 and the limited supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) needed to perform many dental procedures, a recommendation was put forward by the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario for all non-essential and elective dental services to be suspended. OPH closed all but one of its dental clinics and cancelled all non-emergency appointments as of March 16, 2020. Phone consultations were provided, as were limited in-person emergency dental care. Many private dental clinics also closed during this time.

Services were resumed as of May 2020, however barriers remained to resuming normal operations. PPE continued to be difficult to obtain and limitations continued with certain dental procedures; team members remained deployed to other areas and staffing challenges arose. In March 2022, all clinics had returned to pre-pandemic capacity.

In September 2022, after a 2-year pause, dental screenings were resumed in 225 elementary schools. To identify children that might have been missed during the pandemic, more school dental screenings were provided than what is required in the Ontario Public Health Standard - Oral Health Protocol. All grades were screened in 44 high-risk schools, the 10,643 students screened mentioned above.

Prior to the pandemic, OPH dental clinics had over 19,000 dental visits annually. This number dropped to 11,600 visits in the two-year period from April 2020 to March 2022, leaving a significant service gap. In January 2022, OPH had a waiting list of approximately 500 requests for non-urgent treatment. This backlog was addressed in the period January to June 2022. Wait times to book an appointment have returned to the pre-pandemic level of 4 weeks for non-emergency requests. Oral health outreach began in 2022 in Neighbourhood Health and Wellness Hubs, as part of the expansion of the priority neighbourhood approach advanced in the COVID-19 response. OPH implemented services through Hubs during the pandemic to bring services to communities where residents faced the greatest barriers. Dental services include free dental screening, system navigation, supports to enrol clients in Healthy Smiles Ontario and the Ontario Seniors Dental Care Plan, and oral health education is provided to improve self-care. Since the integration of dental services at Hubs in July 2022, 388 clients have been screened with 42% identified as needing dental treatment. OPH works with Community Health and Resource Centres to provide system navigation for their clients to enrol in and access dental services.

Referrals to dental specialists for clients on publicly funded dental programs remain very limited and worsened during the pandemic. The reimbursement rate paid under publicly funded dental programs is low relative to private insurance reimbursement fees and dentists report this is a barrier to offering care. On June 22, 2022, Ottawa City Council approved a motion, [item 24.10](#), requesting that the Mayor write a letter to the Province in support of an increase in these fees.

OPH refers young children to the CHEO dental clinic when they are 3 years of age or younger, are unable to tolerate treatment and have extensive dental needs. However, there is limited capacity within the region to provide dental treatment for healthy young children who require general anaesthesia for extensive dental care. Children referred for oral surgery are triaged and 53% are treated within the target time (vs 61% provincial average) (Ontario Health, November 2022). To help focus on medically compromised children, eligibility criteria were recently reduced from 0 to 5 years of age to 0 to 3 years of age for healthy children who could otherwise be assessed and treated in the community. OPH continues to work with private pediatric offices to expand capacity for pediatric level services as currently there are limited options for this treatment in the community. OPH is actively meeting with oral surgeons and pediatric dentists in the Ottawa region to explore new partnership opportunities to better meet community needs.

OPH refers medically compromised adult patients to The Ottawa Hospital (TOH) dental clinic when dental care cannot safely be delivered in our clinics. The Ottawa Hospital dental clinic also provides dental treatments to hospital in-patients who require dental care, including patients from the Heart Institute, the Cancer Centre and patients awaiting transplant surgery. Due to limited capacity, there is a 3 to 4 month wait time for outpatients.

Expanding and Modernizing OPH Dental Clinics

In 2020, new provincial infrastructure funding was made available through the new Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) to increase dental capacity for the program and OPH was approved for 3 projects. However, before any services or renovations could be initiated, the pandemic priorities delayed these projects. In 2022, OPH was approved to carry over infrastructure funds previously approved. This funding allows clinic expansion and renovations at OPH's Merivale and Cobourg clinics. The renovation and expansion of the Merivale clinic will begin in the spring of 2023 and should take approximately six months to complete. The renovation of the Cobourg clinic will begin in the fall of 2023 and should take approximately 5 months to complete. OPH also received capital funding, under the same program, to establish a new clinic. Space

has been located at 255 Centrum Blvd in Orléans and OPH is currently completing a feasibility study to determine whether the space will meet our needs.

Further modernization will occur through the digitalization of dental clinic patient records. This will improve client care by making the patient charts available across all OPH clinics, ensuring up-to-date health information is available regardless of the access point for OPH dental services. This integration will also allow the transition from conventional radiographic films to a digital system. The use of conventional radiographic films is being phased out globally. OPH procured a dental clinical practice solution integrated with a digital radiographic software. As of the writing of this report, timelines are unknown for this project's full implementation as details are still being finalized in collaboration with the City's Information Technology Solutions (ITS) (see notes in Risk Management Section).

Other Initiatives

OPH coordinates the Ottawa Dental Stakeholders group. This provides a forum within the local dental community to identify gaps in access to dental care for low-income residents of Ottawa and work together to seek local solutions. Membership includes hospital based dental clinics, private dentists and specialists and agencies serving low-income residents (see Consultation Section for membership list).

On the horizon is the new Canadian Dental Care Plan. Details on implementation are expected by the end of 2023. OPH is monitoring how this may adjust the provincial dental programs and whether federal funding opportunities could help improve access to dental care. The federal investment in data collection through Statistics Canada would potentially benefit our program planning as there is limited data available on oral health status and program utilization.

RURAL IMPLICATIONS

Elementary schools located in rural Ottawa are part of the annual dental screening and surveillance activity. System navigation is offered to rural residents to assist them to find treatment services close to home or to access a public health clinic.

CONSULTATION

Consultation was undertaken with the Ottawa Dental Stakeholders Group. Membership is from dental service providers serving low-income residents in Ottawa and includes a representative from the following organizations/groups: Ottawa Public Health (Dental Officer of Health/Dental Program Manager/Supervisor of Dental Health Promotion); Chief of Dentistry at CHEO and the Civic Hospital dental clinics; Pediatric Dentistry,

Oral Surgeons Dentistry; Ottawa Dental Society (Executive), Ottawa Dental Hygienist Society (Executive), and the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres (Executive or delegate), Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health; and the Ottawa Mission.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to receiving the information contained in this report.

RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There is significant risk to our clinic operations being unable to take dental x-rays due to the lack of supply of radiographic film. This is a global pressure as radiographic film is being discontinued. OPH has a tender awarded with ABELDent to install a dental practice solution, including digital radiographic technology and electronic patient charting. Delays arise with the implementation of the technology that requires the city Information Technology Department support. OPH is working closely with ITS to inform them of the urgency of this project to ensure continuity of clinic operations and has prioritized the project's imaging related deliverables accordingly.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

There are no accessibility impacts associated with this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

A project to modernize dental patient records and imaging was brought to Information Technology Services' attention in 2022 and initiated in January 2023 following the finalization of vendor contracts. The initial project scope included both the implementation of ABELDent software for the creation of patient profiles and scheduling, as well as the implementation of an imaging solution, which includes several types of digital imaging. Once the risk of lack of radiographic film supply was brought to ITS' attention, the project approach shifted to deliver the critical imaging portion first, and then the remainder of the imaging and ABELDent deliverables. Although critical to addressing the film supply issue, this change to the phasing of the project introduces new technical risk and complexity, which could impact timelines for completing the full project scope.

Following the completion of the first project phase, IT Services will work closely with OPH and the vendor(s) to plan and implement the remaining project scope.

ALIGNMENT WITH OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Comprehensive oral and dental care are essential to protect the health of our community. Ensuring Ottawa residents can access timely, affordable, and appropriate dental services, with a focus on equity, prevention, and impact, aligns with Ottawa Public Health's strategic plan 2019–2022.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Document 1 – Location of OPH Dental Clinics

Document 2 - Dental Programs with which OPH engages and works

DISPOSITION

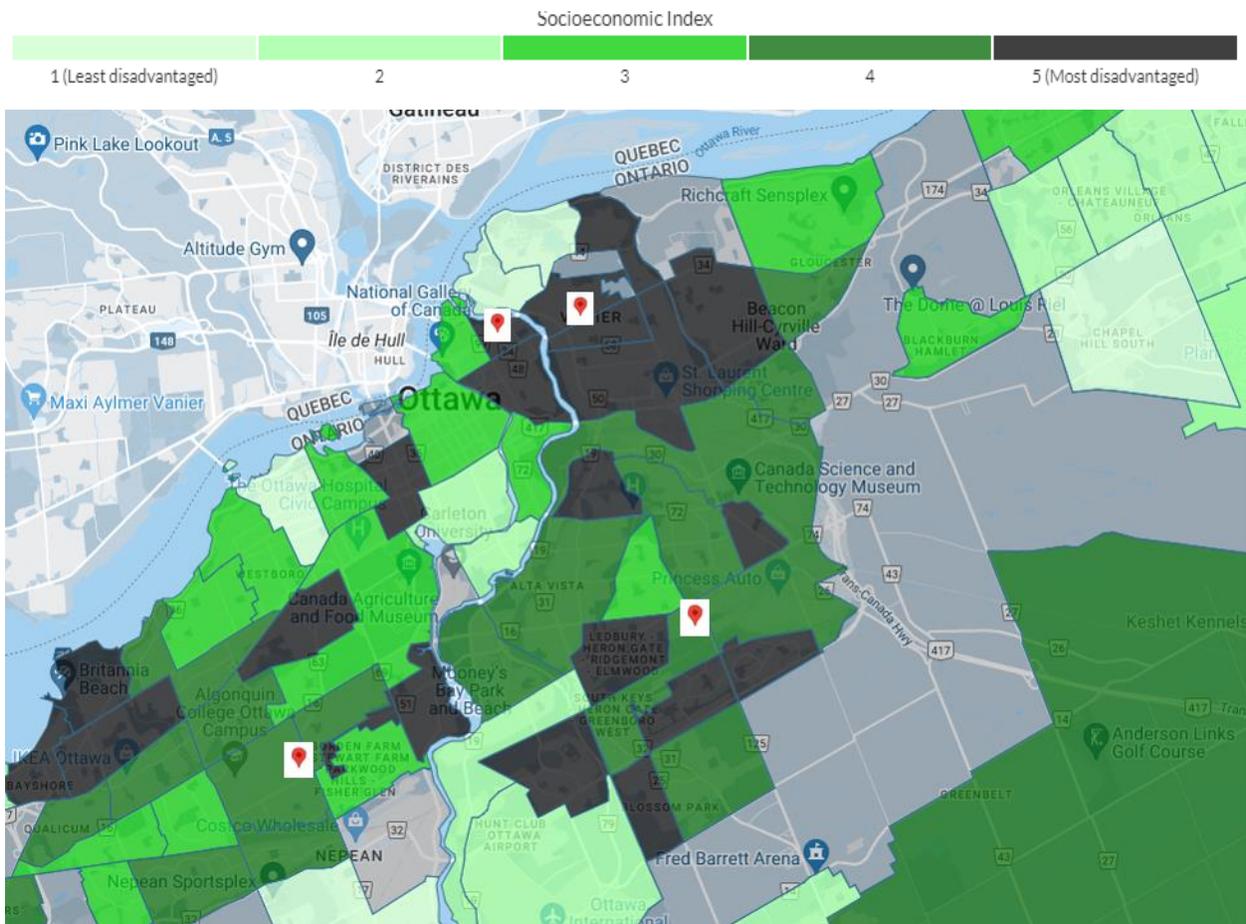
This report is for information. Ottawa Public Health will continue to work with partners to advance dental health programming and services in Ottawa.

Document 1 - - Location of OPH Dental Clinics

Locations of current OPH dental clinics, March 2023 (red markers on map)

Locations are: 1580 Merivale Road, Suite 400; 40 Cobourg (in Le Patro community centre); 2525 St Laurent Blvd (near Conroy Rd); 299 Montreal Road (in Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health).

All dental clinics are in neighbourhoods that are between 4 to 5 (most disadvantaged) on the socio-economic index. This demonstrates an effective approach to embedding OPH services within the most in-need neighbourhoods.



Document 2 -- Dental Programs with which OPH engages and works

ADULT Dental programs	Type of program	How to apply?	Where is treatment provided?	Treatment provided
Ontario Works (OW)	Municipal program in Ottawa	Community Social Services Dept (CSSD) Ottawa	Ottawa Public Health (OPH) dental clinics	Emergency care
Essential Health & Social Support (EHSS)	Municipal program in Ottawa	CSSD Ottawa – also covers other health items/services (hearing aids, glasses, etc.)	OPH dental clinics	Emergency care
Community Denture Program	Municipal program in Ottawa - dentures for low-income adults and seniors, OW & ODSP recipients	CSSD Ottawa	OPH dental clinics and private offices	Dentures as per guidelines
Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)	Provincial		Private offices	Basic care
Interim Federal Health	Federal	Refugee claimants	Private offices	Emergency care
Non-Insured Health Benefits	Federal	Inuit and First Nations	Wabano Dental Clinic or Private offices	Basic care

CHILDREN	Type of Program	Eligibility	Where is treatment provided?	Treatment provided
Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) - Core	Provincial Program Low-income 0-17 yrs. of age	Must meet the financial eligibility. Children on OW & ODSP are automatically enrolled.	OPH Dental clinics and private offices	Basic level services, checkups, cleanings, sealants, fillings, extractions.
HSO – Emergency and Essential Services Stream (EESS)	Provincial Program Low-income 0-17 yrs. of age	Must have dental needs Parents declare that it would cause finance hardship to obtain dental treatment.		
Children’s Aid (CAS)	Ottawa Program	CAS Ottawa		
HSO preventive (PSO)	Provincial Program Low-income 0-17 yrs. of age	Not eligible for HSO Core and EESS. Must meet the financial eligibility	OPH Dental clinics only	Preventive care only - fluoride, fissure sealants
SENIORS	Type of Program	Eligibility	Where is treatment provided?	Treatment provided
Ontario Senior’s Dental Care Program (OSDCP)	Provincial Program Low-income 65+	Must meet the financial eligibility. 65+ Have no access to any other form of dental benefits	OPH Dental clinics and private offices	Basic level services, checkups, cleanings, fillings, extractions, dentures, RCT or/and crown (Private offices must submit pre-d.)

¹ Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Populations and Public Health Division. Oral Health Protocol, 2018 [Internet]. 2018 [cited 2023 Feb 28]. Available from: https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/Oral_Health_Protocol_2018_en.pdf

² Ontario Ministry of Health. Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirement for Programs, Services and Accountability [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2023 Feb 28]. Available from: https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/Ontario_Public_Health_Standards_2021.pdf

³ World Health Organization. Global oral health status report: towards universal health coverage for oral health by 2030 [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2023 Feb 28]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240061484>

⁴ ibid

⁵ ibid

⁶ Canadian Dental Association. The State of Oral Health - A snapshot of oral health in Canada [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2023 Feb 28]. Available from: <https://www.cda-adc.ca/stateoforalhealth/snap/>

⁷ Ayer S, Green P, Canada S. The State of Oral Health in Ottawa Left Behind: Left Behind: The State of Oral Health in Ottawa 2 Acknowledgements Lead researcher and author. [cited 2023 Feb 28]; Available from: <https://assets.greenshield.ca/greenshield/attachments/pdfs/oral-health-reports/OT-OralHealthReport-Final.pdf>

⁸ Canadian Community Health Survey 2017, Statistics Canada, Share File, Ontario Ministry of Health

⁹ ibid

¹⁰ Mueller M. Landmark dental care study in Indigenous population shows failures in system - Research & Innovation [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2023 Feb 28]. Available from: <https://www.yorku.ca/research/category/news/2019/11/landmark-dental-care-study-in-indigenous-population-shows-failures-in-system/>

¹¹ Office of the Auditor General of Canada. Report 4—Oral Health Programs for First Nations and Inuit—Health Canada [Internet]. 2017 [cited 2023 Feb 28]. Available from: https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201711_04_e_42669.html#p73

¹² Ministry of Health. Dental care for low-income seniors | ontario.ca [Internet]. 2023 [cited 2023 Feb 28]. Available from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/dental-care-low-income-seniors>