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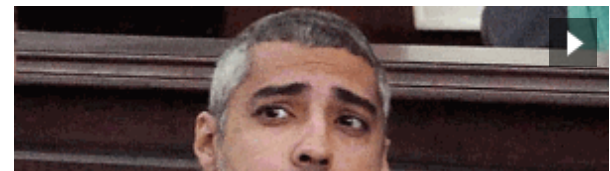
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High costs keep 6 million Canadians from the dentist each year: report



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Andrea Janus, CTVNews.ca
[@AndreaJanus](#)

Published Saturday, September 13, 2014 10:00AM EDT

Chantal Robinson was pregnant and writhing in pain on her classroom floor, all because she couldn't afford the dental care required to fix her rotting teeth.

"I was curled up into a ball, crying," Robinson says of the moment seven years ago. She was in her early 20s, and her life-long problems with receding gumlines and tooth enamel deficiency had worsened.

"The pain was just unbearable. I had constant migraines, and my face swelled up a few times to the point where I had to take myself to the emergency room."

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But the dental care voucher she was eligible for while receiving social assistance didn't come close to covering the estimated \$4,000 to \$6,000 cost of having her teeth pulled and her mouth fitted for dentures.

"I had to choose either between trying to get my teeth fixed, and paying my rent and feeding my children," Robinson told CTVNews.ca earlier this week in a telephone interview. "And I chose paying my rent and feeding my children."

Robinson isn't the only Canadian with such a story, given that dental care is excluded from the Canada Health Act and therefore not part of this country's universal health care regime. A new report paints a grim picture of access to dental care in Canada.

The study found "substantial inequalities" in access to care for approximately six million Canadians who do not go to the dentist because of the cost. Included in that figure are some of Canada's most vulnerable groups: the elderly, young children and adolescents, recent immigrants, First Nations, the poor and working poor, and people with disabilities.

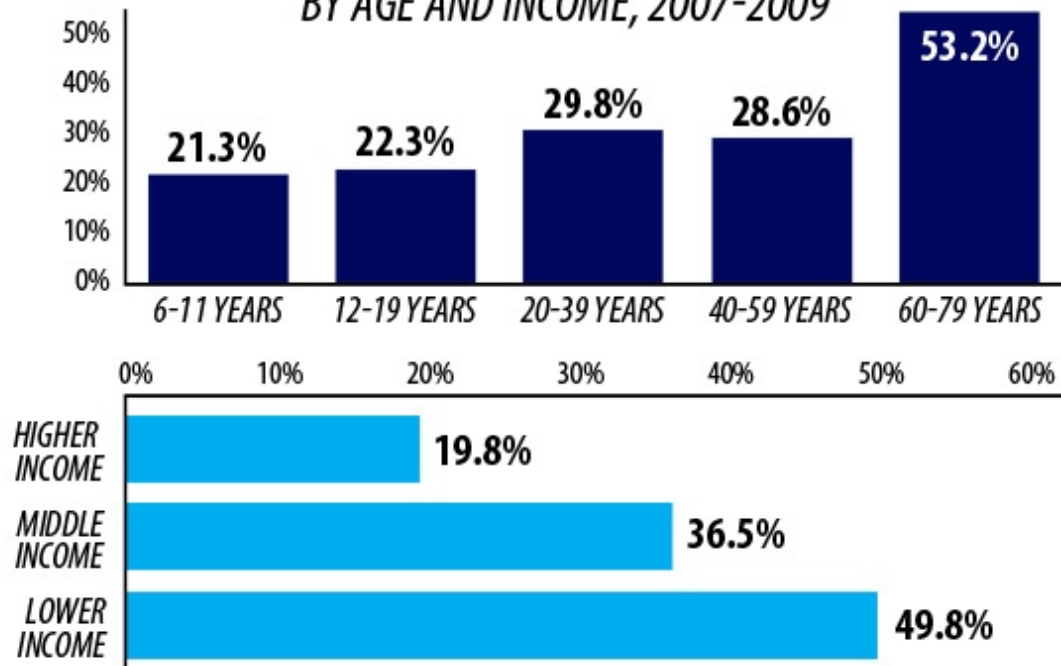


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PEOPLE WITHOUT DENTAL INSURANCE COVERAGE

BY AGE AND INCOME, 2007-2009



The report, "Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Vulnerable People Living in Canada," was issued by the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS) and released Saturday at the Canadian Association of Public Health Dentistry conference in Saskatoon.

The report follows three years of work by a multidisciplinary health-care panel tasked with probing access to oral health care in Canada.

Compared to the rest of the Canadian population, vulnerable groups are:

- less likely to have dental insurance;
- more likely to avoid going to the dentist due to the cost;
- more likely to have untreated dental decay, gum disease, and dental pain;
- and are more likely to avoid eating fruits and vegetables due to problems with their mouths.

While a lack of insurance and concerns about high costs are major reasons why Canadians avoid the dentist, other barriers include a lack of transportation, patient fears, and an inability to navigate a system that includes services provided by multiple levels of government.

Dr. Paul Allison, chair of the faculty of dentistry at McGill University in Montreal and chair of the

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CAHS panel that issued the report, notes that between 70 and 75 per cent of the Canadian population can access quality dental care.

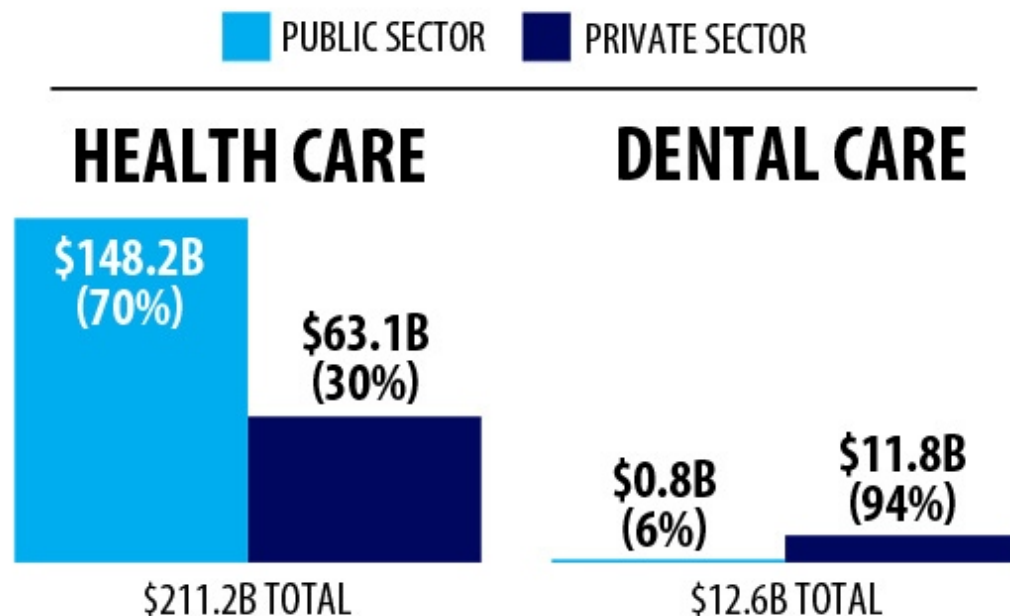
However, the remaining quarter have significant difficulty accessing any kind of care at all.

“With the approach that Canada has to looking after everybody in the community, we would say this is a big problem. Dental decay, gum disease, and dental pain are very common problems,” Allison told CTVNews.ca in a telephone interview earlier this week.

It’s “not fair” that so many Canadians must live in pain, which compromises their ability to work, go to school and even eat many foods, Allison said.

“We should as a population be saying ‘we need to do something about this.’”

TOTAL HEALTH AND DENTAL CARE EXPENDITURES BY SOURCE OF FINANCE, 2013



'Oral care just as important as your heart'

Because dental care is not included in the Canada Health Act, the vast majority of dental services in this country are paid for by private insurance or out-of-pocket.



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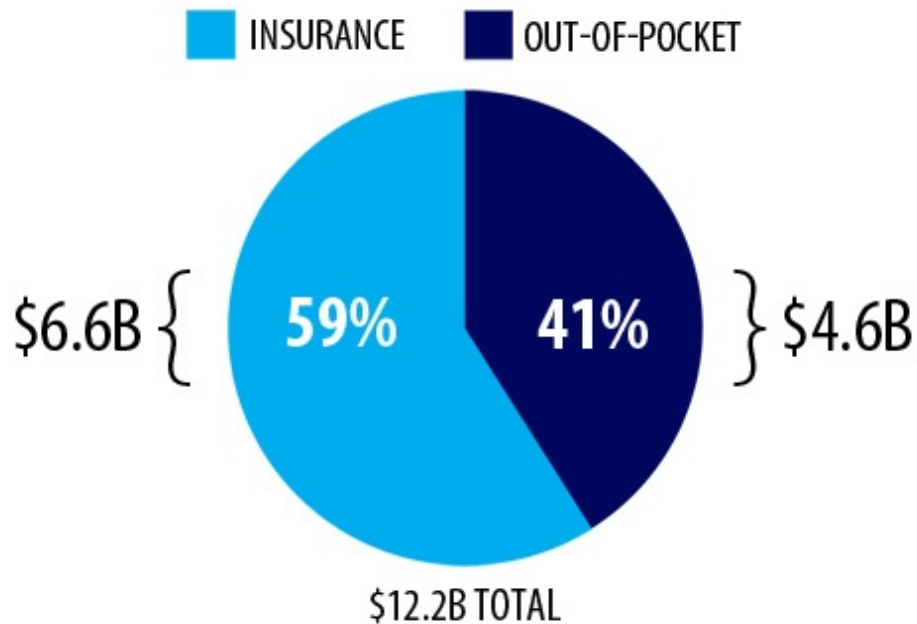
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Taxpayers cover some 70 per cent of health care costs to the tune of about \$148 billion. Only about 6 per cent of dental care costs, about \$800 million, are paid for with public funds.

According to 2011 data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information:

- 59 per cent of private dental care expenditures, about \$6.6 billion, were paid for by insurance.
- the remaining 41 per cent, some \$4.6 billion, was paid by patients out-of-pocket.

TOTAL PRIVATE DENTAL CARE EXPENDITURES BY SOURCE OF FINANCE, 2011



And according to the new 2014 report report, nearly 50 per cent of Canadians in the lowest-income bracket do not have dental insurance, compared to just under 20 per cent in the highest bracket.

“We have a system in Canada where we say if you’ve got a large wound on your arm, you can go to a doctor or go to the hospital and have it looked at and it will be free of charge for you,” Allison said.

But severe gum disease is akin to having a wound about the size of your arm, and patients either

need private insurance or must pay out of pocket if they are to get the necessary treatment.

“So there’s a very iniquitous situation going on here that we need to accept,” Allison said.

During one visit to the ER, doctors gave Robinson Percocet and sent her on her way. She missed school and work, and as her teeth continued to decay she started hiding her mouth when spoke or smiled. She works two jobs in the food-services industry, but one job does not have a health or dental plan, and she doesn’t qualify for the plan at the other.

Robinson finally got the dental work she needed last year at the Kingston Community Health Centre, which offers dental care to families in financial need.

Now she fears she won’t be able to pay for care for her daughter, who is showing symptoms of gum problems and tooth enamel deficiency.

“There needs to be some sort of health plan that includes oral health care, because oral health care is just as important as your heart,” she said. “With bad teeth and not being able to get them fixed, you can’t eat the proper foods you need to eat, you’re constantly in the hospital, constantly missing work or missing school.”

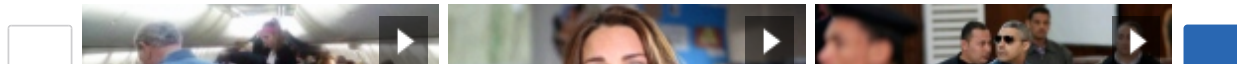
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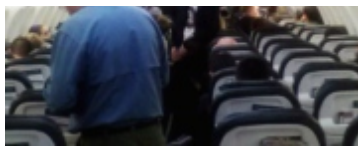
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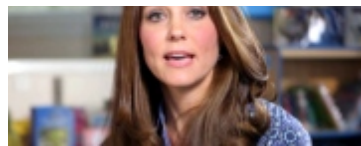
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Jane

Oct. 16, 2014
6:35 PM

Even when you have coverage it is unaffordable! We have a good plan but still need to shell out hundreds of dollars. No wonder people are all running south to get their teeth done.

Prevention Goal #1

Sep. 16, 2014
5:44 PM

It is so sad that so many people are in need who have low income. There are some low cost care clinics available now in BC but you still have to have some money even with the 30 % discount. Dental Hygienists in many provinces are now able to provide preventive treatment to people without having a dentist look at you. That is worthwhile accessing to prevent future problems. It is cheaper too! I am always amazed how people can spend money on manicures and pedicures and lots of hair products and dye jobs but never on their teeth? Even their dogs have more dental care than they allow themselves. Yes, it is between 150 and 250 dollars for teeth cleaning but if your gums are infected then your whole body is infected from them. Prevention starts early and the government does provide some funding for healthy kids programs. Hope you can find a dental office that accepts it though...some will not see people on social assistance programs :(They have proven that gum disease affects heart disease and early birth of babies and can contribute to diabetes etc.

Darryl

Sep. 16, 2014
1:09 PM

It's funny that I came across this story today. I had to make an emergency appointment to deal with a broken tooth I've had since last night. I never go to the dentist unless it's an emergency, and as a low wage Canadian, I can't afford it either.

mj

Sep. 16, 2014
12:57 PM

There is no question that a visit to the dentist takes a good chunk of my money out of my bank account. At times, I refused to go see the dentist, and I believe the twice a year checkup is overkill given

Abuse

my dental health, but twice yearly is great for the dental industry. That said, I have recently found a dentist who I can trust. I've had two scammers before: one told me I had 7 cavities when I had never had a cavity in my life (second opinion years later proved her wrong) and another one did a root canal without diagnosis. No wonder dentists have a high suicide rate - the things some of them do to people, just to make money. In this day and age, when they are governed by all kinds of regulations to ensure all health professionals have the patient's interests foremost, these situations should never occur. Nor should a dentist fail to transfer your files to another dentist. (Big red flag on that one).

oppdetcon

Sep. 16, 2014
11:11 AM

Abuse

Yet here in Canada we will spend billions of tax dollars on a French language for the sake of 2 provinces. Hospitals and as stated in the above article, People are suffering in Canada, especially hospitals in Quebec, yet they feel this tax money is better spent on a language. Imagine the health care system we could have once again, if we put our priorities in order...

s

Sep. 15, 2014
8:03 PM

Abuse

@Dental Student "when a tooth will not accept freezing, it is an indicator of infection. Dental Health 101, most people in general know this" It can be an indicator of infection but other factors can influence local. Lowers molars can commonly have accessory innervation,

s

Sep. 15, 2014
7:54 PM

Abuse

@Sid in MTL "You better take a good look at dentistry then and now. Not a damn thing has changed in 35 years." That is a ridiculous statement. Absolutely ridiculous. I've been a DDS for 18 years and while the fundamentals remain constant, it is amazing how much technology, materials etc have improved. You haven't seen a DDS in 35 years so how would you know what's changed!

Abuse affects everyone

Sep. 15, 2014
5:32 PM

Abuse

The problem is twofold - insured patients who will go for as much as they can for "free", and dentists who will push and push for the max. I work as a receptionist for a dental clinic and although I am not the one at the front doing the billing, I know for a fact that when the patient is insured the therapist, hygienist and dentist will all do as much work as they can and rack up as large a bill as possible. And of course the patient is more than happy to go along and get all the fixings, as long as it's not coming out of their pocket. Problem is when a patient who comes in who is not insured and is

paying out of their own pocket, they get the same treatment and cannot afford it. A lot of times they simply do not come back for the work and suffer in silence.

Cyni1972

Sep. 15, 2014
12:30 PM

Abuse

In Alberta the average dental check up and cleaning is 350-400.00 and going up all the time.

Heather

Sep. 15, 2014
9:58 AM

Abuse

I would suspect that those going to Cuba on holidays are more than likely people employed where there is a dental plan as part of the benefit package. There is a huge section of middle/lower class wage earners with NO benefit packages. With a teeth cleaning costing almost \$200 there is no way they can afford it. And if they can manage to scrape anything together, they'd put their kids ahead of themselves. What a dentist charges is atrocious. Basic dental care should be covered under OHIP, full stop. It is well documented that poor dental health causes all kinds of other medical problems.

simon

Sep. 15, 2014
9:29 AM

Abuse

Dentist are coming here from foreign countries getting rich and rich, some are even scamming our insurances. I know a dentist he tried to scam Manulife for years with double charging until they caught on to him, then his 3 offices just closed and he disappeared from Ottawa. no one knows what really happened.

OttawaT

Sep. 15, 2014
9:08 AM

Abuse

Even with Dental Insurance, it's still cost prohibitive to have anything like implants , which aren't usualy covered or dentures, of which only a small amount is covered. I spent several years without dental care as I didn't have insurance and now that I do have insurance, it still can't get all the work I need done as it would cost over \$4,000 and my insurance doesn't cover that much.

Heather Colls

Sep. 15, 2014
8:14 AM

Abuse

My teeth are a mess as we have not had dental insurance and only qualified 18 months ago. I had some done every year but it is now about \$12,000 worth of work I need. I am going to get them pulled and then dentures as my coverage is not that good. My dentist said to me that it is a toss up who costs more the vet or him. I am not sure how I should have taken that. My dentist is not the most up to date as I had to go to the emergency dentist on Christmas Day and

for sure he was way up there in all the toys (tools) and I did not find him any more expensive.

Angry Bird

Sep. 15, 2014
6:50 AM

Abuse

I agree with "Fed up with the whinning". I for one do not want to pay for other peoples dentist problems, because thats what it will be to give everyone universal care. Bad enough we have to pay for baby boomers who blew all there money and didnt save for retirement. And on another note, universal systems seems kind like communism, and look how well that worked in Russia.

Dalimar Blackheart

Sep. 15, 2014
4:15 AM

Abuse

I can explain for you right now why dentistry and medical care is as expensive as it is - Insurance! The majority of people that walk into a dentist office have coverage of some sort, because the average Joe doesn't. Those insurance claims are what keeps the dentist in business. Exact same issue for the medical industry - because the government and insurance companies foot the bill there is no market pressure to keep the prices in line.

Lloyd R

Sep. 15, 2014
1:05 AM

Abuse

Add it to the cost to Medicare. The budget will balance itself. The Federal Government will come out with a simplified tax form (one page long). It will say "did you have income last year?". If the answer is "yes" the form will say "Give it to us"".

Sid in MTL

Sep. 14, 2014
10:54 PM

Abuse

@ Dental Student, Yeah, no kidding, that's what the E.R. doctor told me. He said the dentist should have known better. @ s; You better take a good look at dentistry then and now. Not a damn thing has changed in 35 years. BTW, I sued the dentist for negligence, unnecessary pain and suffering, and I won (well my lawyer did for sure) thanks to the testimony of the E.R. doctor who treated me immediately after my torture. Furthermore, his license to practice (and that's exactly what he was doing, practicing) dentistry was revoked; not only due to my case but other complaints on file against him. Not easy to get a second opinion in a village with only one dentist on duty.

Show me the money!!

Sep. 14, 2014
9:30 PM

Abuse

LOL Dr. S, did you not read the comments? The people have stopped. They have thought. And then they realized why dentists are more expensive here. Can you say, "Show me the money!"

More Bang for my Buck

Sep. 14, 2014
9:22 PM

Abuse

Dr. S. it is a little late now to try to convince Canadians that out of country dentistry is unsafe. People are having it done all the time, with little if any problems! Sorry, but scare mongering will not work. I will admit it does make it bad for all you Canadian dentists to see how cheaply SOME will do it for. Looks pretty greedy to me.

Dental Student

Sep. 14, 2014
9:04 PM

Abuse

@s - when a tooth will not accept freezing, it is an indicator of infection. Dental Health 101, most people in general know this, the dentist most assuredly did. Why he proceeded is beyond me.

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