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## Dental dilemma: No 'magical financial solution' to fixing oral health care



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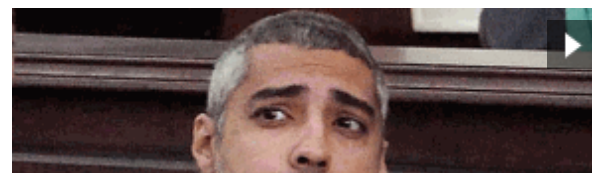
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**Andrea Janus**, CTVNews.ca  
[@AndreaJanus](#)

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

While millions of Canadians cannot afford to go to the dentist for basic care, experts are not looking for “a magical financial solution” to making dental care accessible for everyone.

With its report, “Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Vulnerable People Living in Canada,” the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences has issued a number of recommendations for improving both access and the care itself.

The report is not a blanket request for more funding from federal, provincial and municipal governments.

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“We’re not expecting there to be a magical financial solution,” says Dr. Paul Allison, chair of the expert panel that issued the report.

“On the other hand there are imaginative ways one can explore delivering care in different ways. The classic model of dentists in a private office is not working for these groups.”

The first order of business, then, will be to get dental- and health-care stakeholders together to develop an agreed-upon national standard for preventative and restorative oral health care, “irrespective of (patients’) physical or geographical ability to access services, or their capacity to pay,” the report says.

While different regions of the country will have different priorities based on their demographics, there would be a number of large- and small-scale projects to choose from based on need.

Some of the ways that access and overall oral health can be improved:

- Mobile dental units;
- Clinics at community health centres or long-term care homes;
- Or programs that provide preventative care for children under a certain age.



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After those standards are established, a process that could take about a year, stakeholders have to identify the systems and the personnel needed to deliver that care.

While dental care is not included in the Canada Health Act and so does not fall under the national system of health insurance, it could be added either wholly or in part. A select number of basic services, such as regular cleanings, could be offered to all Canadians, with extra services available to Canadians deemed to be at greater need, the report says.

The exact cost of publicly financing basic dental care for all Canadians has yet to be determined, Allison said. However, the report notes that because workplace dental benefits are not treated as employee income, they are not taxed as such. This leaves “a significant level of foregone revenue that could, at least in theory, be used to finance care for underserved groups,” the report notes.

Estimates suggest that the federal government loses about \$1.6 billion due to employee and employer tax breaks, and “the total loss in revenue may be much higher once foregone revenues from provincial and payroll taxes are considered,” the report says.

Indeed, the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada estimated that the loss in revenue from all benefits, including dental insurance, for all levels of government is about \$4 billion.

The report also suggests that dentists themselves have a role to play in improving access to care. Dental schools should “promote and deliver continuing education that equips practicing professionals with the knowledge and skills to understand and treat the oral health care needs of vulnerable groups.”

In the end, Allison said, a lack of oral health care “goes against what we would say are the values of the Canadian health care system. And I think we should acknowledge that and try to do something about that.”

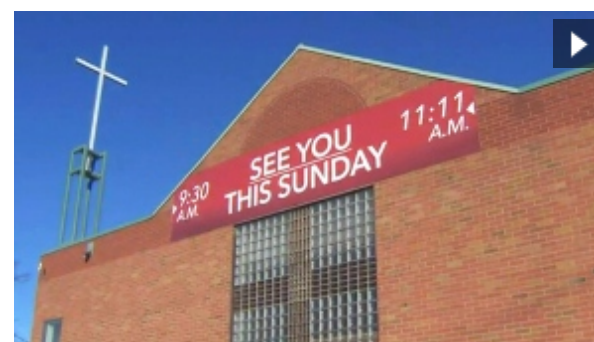
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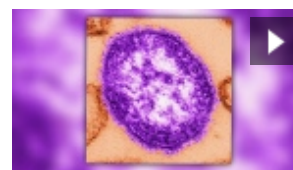
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Because more than 90 per cent of dental services are provided through the private sector, there is no agreed-upon, national standard for oral health care in Canada. Services that are publicly funded are provided by various levels of government and the types of services offered vary greatly by jurisdiction.

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**nan**

Sep. 15, 2014  
12:44 AM

"with extra services available to Canadians deemed to be at greater need" oh those deems are never cheap, nor effective.

**Dave**

Sep. 14, 2014  
6:50 PM

\$40 for a bottle of whisky or rum and yes you can pull your own achy tooth.

**jayme**

Sep. 14, 2014  
6:08 PM

Liz/Steve In Ontario if you claim refugee status you get free dental care.

**R Berry**

Sep. 14, 2014  
12:22 PM

As I mentioned in an earlier comment, upfront costs keep even the insured out of dentists offices. A compromise that could help the future might be having dental school students participate in publicly funded sessions of routine care under supervision of a dentist and dental hygienist. They would travel to under-served rural areas, and once or twice a year have a week long session in smaler cities that have a large number of under-served or working poor populations. This would serve as excellent under graduate and post graduate work in that field. The mere fact that this problem exists shows the dangers of the movement to privatize health care, especially in Alberta.

**Uncommon Sense**

Sep. 14, 2014  
12:06 PM

I like how the system cuts you loose as soon as you're 18 and serious dental issues begin to crop up

Abuse

**art pull**

Sep. 14, 2014  
11:22 AM

weren't we told, that lottery profits and g s t revenues were going to go for healthcare.....seems to me that with all the revenue from them, we could get cheaper dental care.....

Abuse

**sarah**

Sep. 14, 2014  
2:32 AM

nothing "magical" involved in providing insurance. I can't find it anywhere. universal health care is a myth if it excludes care for essential body parts like the MOUTH and SPINE.

Abuse

**-kilo-**

Sep. 14, 2014  
2:11 AM

There is a fed election in just over a year away - let's try and make this an issue. We need something more than the paltry private insurance - anything, to try and help Canadians further overcome the expensive dental costs. I'm a healthy person, but the last 10 years seeing the dentist even with insurance, has gotten a huge % of any disposable income. No down payment for a house for me - it went to them.

Abuse

**thomas**

Sep. 14, 2014  
12:17 AM

to keep costs down, let dental tech's do the routine dental work at much lower rates.

Abuse

**Liz**

Sep. 13, 2014  
7:38 PM

@ Daphne - I am a immigrant I would love to know where I can get free dental, like any other tax paying Canadian I have to pay. Also Daphne for the record, as an immigrant I had to prove I could support myself when I arrived here and paid money for doing so!

Abuse

**Bradley Smith**

Sep. 13, 2014  
4:25 PM

Dental Crae should definitely be covered under the Health Act, as bad teeth are a direct cause of Heart Disease, and directly affects someones employ ability. My quote from my dentist in Canada was just over \$34,000, and the work would be done in 2 visits.

Abuse

Something wrong there. I'll take a holiday overseas and get it all fixed with expenses in for about \$4500.00.

**Steve**

Sep. 13, 2014  
3:53 PM

Abuse

daphne, immigrants do not get free dental care in this country. wherever you received your information, it is wrong. if you want dental care covered, start demanding it from your politicians. Canadians are complacent and do nothing but complain about things instead of getting involved in the policy making in this country. A few thousand letters to each MP will make a big difference.

**Raj**

Sep. 13, 2014  
3:50 PM

Abuse

Oral health is is just as important as the rest of the body, as everything works together. And poor oral health can be an extreme socio-economic barrier. Dental care should be covered by health care and there are many dentists who agree wit this.

**Garth**

Sep. 13, 2014  
3:39 PM

Abuse

@Rob. My dentist turns his office into a sports bar at night.

**Luch**

Sep. 13, 2014  
2:52 PM

Abuse

@Elisabeth - you hit the nail on the head!

**bm**

Sep. 13, 2014  
2:24 PM

Abuse

I have terrible teeth, but I lessened my dental costs with regular brushing and flossing, took me a while to figure that out, it does work and help. Let's start there.

**Elsbeth**

Sep. 13, 2014  
12:01 PM

Abuse

Dentists charge entirely too much. Even with my insurance, I have to pay. As per the insurance company, dentists in Ontario are charging like celebrity dentists. I say dentists should be regulated like doctors with capped fees.

**daphne jones**

Sep. 13, 2014

Senior citizens desperately need dental care. We deserve dental care. Dental care must be revamped and a system set up similar to

11:54 AM

Abuse

the medical system. No more freebies for immigrants - we were told immigrants receive free dental care in Canada! Were told Community Services upped the dental coverage to children 18 years of age!! Dental work is just as important as visiting your MD/GP. Seniors need dental care NOW!! Many, many seniors have volunteered countless hours, happily, to this country in terms of nonprofit organizations, etc. We have offered our best work to our country - many of us being called upon to offer sound advice in many areas of industry, helping professions, etc.

**Jim**

Sep. 13, 2014

11:35 AM

Abuse

Big Steve, yes, just like the Liberals did for many years. I do remember Chretien and Martin and even P. Trudeau.!

**Luch**

Sep. 13, 2014

11:10 AM

Abuse

@Rob - right on!

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