

Oral Screening and Healthy Smiles Ontario

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health receive this report for information.

Key Points

- Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) provided oral health screenings in all publicly funded schools across Wellington, Dufferin, and Guelph (WDG) during the 2024/2025 school year.
- Fluoride varnish was offered on two different occasions to eligible students attending local schools
- The Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) program delivered a wide range of preventive services, including fluoride varnish, dental sealants, scaling, and oral hygiene education, through WDGPH's fixed dental clinics.
- The introduction of a daycare-based screening and fluoride varnish pilot provided preventive oral health care for children aged 12 months to 4 years in select early learning environments.
- Preventive oral health services were also delivered at community hubs such as the Shelldale Community Centre and Dufferin area EarlyON Centres.
- Portable dental clinics were deployed in Palmerston to serve rural families, removing barriers related to transportation and accessibility.
- Upcoming priorities include launching in-school and community preventive dental clinics as well as expanding the daycare screening and fluoride varnish program across additional sites.

Background

Oral health is a critical component of overall health and well-being, particularly in childhood. The Oral Health Screening Program and Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO) are key public health initiatives delivered by Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) under Ontario's Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) and the School Health Program Standard.

The Oral Health Screening Program provides annual dental assessments in all publicly funded schools, identifying students with urgent and non-urgent needs and offering referrals to ensure timely treatment. Preventative services and oral health education are also provided to reduce the risk of dental decay, which remains one of the most common chronic conditions in children.

The HSO program provides free dental care for children and youth (ages 0–17) from low-income families who meet eligibility criteria. Through this program, WDGPH operates preventative clinics that address oral health inequities and support children's ability to learn, eat, and grow free from dental pain and infection.

In 2024/2025, WDGPH continued to strengthen its oral health mandate by expanding services beyond traditional clinic and school settings. The introduction of daycare-based screening and fluoride varnish programs, community-based initiatives, and portable preventive clinics has helped reach children earlier in life and those who face barriers to accessing routine dental care.

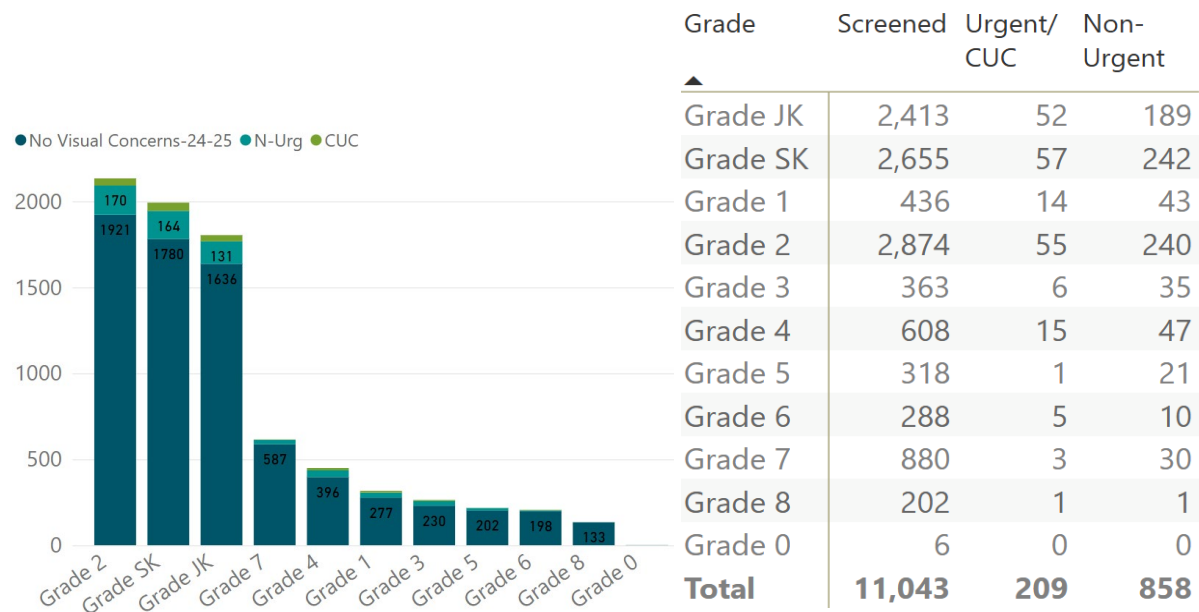
Discussion

School Oral Health Screenings

During the 2024/2025 school year, oral health screening services were conducted in all publicly funded schools across the WDG region. Screening data provides essential insight into the state of oral health among local children, guiding the planning of preventative interventions and referrals to the HSO program or community dental professionals. Early identification of oral disease enables intervention before conditions worsen, improving long-term oral and overall health outcomes. Table 1 breaks down the screening results per grade.

The general results were as follows:

- Number of schools screened: 89 Board schools and 24 Parochial schools
- Number of children screened: 11,043
- Children identified with urgent needs: 209
- Children identified with non-urgent needs: 858

Table 1: Screening Results per Grade


**CUC stands for children with urgent care needs or, an urgent need*

Fluoride Varnish Applications in Schools

Fluoride varnish is a safe, effective, and evidence-based preventive measure shown to significantly reduce dental caries. All children enrolled with WDG school boards were offered fluoride varnish on two separate occasions, three or more months apart.

- Children who received one application: 7292
- Children who received two applications: 3268

By integrating fluoride varnish into the school program, WDGPH ensures that children who may not otherwise access dental care receive preventive support in a familiar and accessible environment.

Healthy Smiles Ontario Preventive Services

The HSO program continues to serve as a vital safety net for families who experience barriers to accessing dental care due to cost, transportation, or lack of insurance coverage.

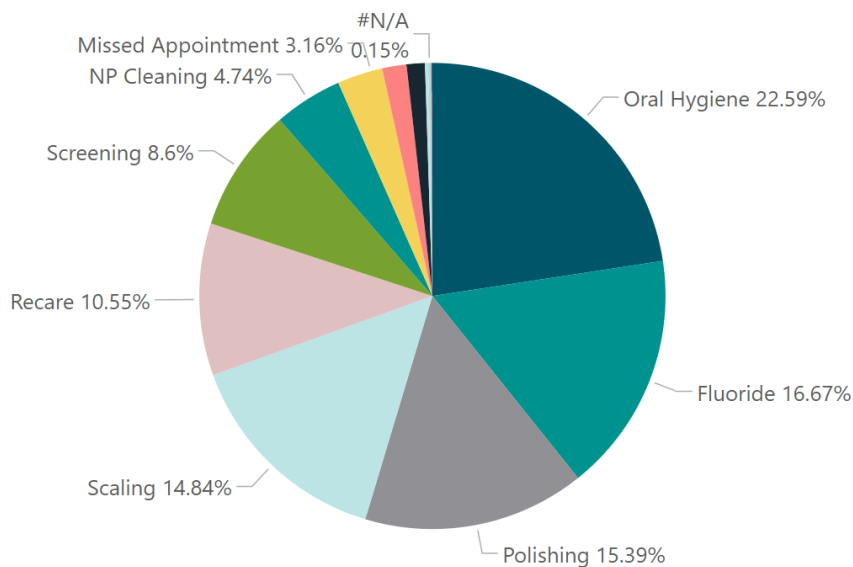
In 2024/2025, preventive services were delivered through WDGPH's fixed dental clinics, focusing on children identified through school screenings and community referrals.

429 children were enrolled in HSO preventative services in the 2024/25 school year, with 745 appointments occurring. Services delivered included: Scaling, polishing, sealants, fluoride varnish, oral hygiene instruction, and dental education. Services are broken down in figure 1. and figure 2. below.

Figure 1: Monthly Services Accessed and Total Clients Seen from Sept 2024-August 2025

Service Date - Month	Screening only	New Patient Cleanings	Recare	Sealants	Total Clients Seen
September	39	12	65	1	116
October	34	7	60		99
November	34	7	46		86
December	19	5	29		53
January	38	19	81		136
February	30	10	48		87
March	26	28	96		150
April	45	16	43	1	101
May	35	20	56	2	109
June	76	25	50	1	151
July	67	34	68	4	166
August	41	46	67	3	155

Figure 2: Number of Clients by Appointment Type



These efforts contribute directly to reducing oral health disparities and improving overall child health outcomes in the community.

Daycare Screening and Fluoride Varnish Pilot Program

Recognizing the importance of early intervention, WDGPB introduced a pilot program in select daycare centres across WDG. The pilot provided both oral health screenings and fluoride varnish applications for children aged 12 months to 4 years.

- Number of daycares participating: 7 located across Guelph and Wellington County
- Children screened: 123
- Children receiving fluoride varnish: 100

The pilot project was very successful and garnered a lot of positive feedback from both the daycares and families involved. Giving children a positive first dental experience is important for willing participation in future routine dental visits.

This initiative aims to establish preventive oral health habits early in life and strengthen the link between oral health and early childhood education programs.

Community-Based Oral Health Initiatives

Shelldale Community Centre and Dufferin EarlyON Centres

WDGPB partnered with community organizations to deliver screenings and fluoride varnish in settings that serve families with young children. These accessible, non-clinical environments encouraged participation and supported oral health education for parents. Over the course of 6 visits to Shelldale Community Centre, screening was conducted with 92 children, which led to 16 urgent needs being identified. Fluoride was applied to 59 children as well. Many families received onsite support with enrolling in the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) and HSO

Over the course of 3 visits to the different Early ON locations in Dufferin:

26 children had screening completed, leading to 1 urgent need being identified. 10 children received fluoride varnish. Time was dedicated to providing education around good oral hygiene practices for infants and toddlers as well as healthy drinking and eating habits.

The feedback from these visits has been overwhelmingly positive with discussions around future opportunities across Guelph and Wellington sites.

Preventive Portable Clinics in Palmerston

Portable dental clinics were deployed in Palmerston to improve service reach in rural communities where access to dental care is limited. Screening and insurance enrolment help was provided on four separate occasions which allowed the hygienists to identify the children who needed preventative cleaning and book them into the portable clinic. The portable clinic ran over 4 days in July and August. This clinic resulted in:

- 93 children received preventative cleanings
- 35 children were identified with urgent needs
- 26 children enrolled in the Healthy Smiles Ontario Emergency and Essential Services Stream (HSO EESS) , while 43 were enrolled in the HSO preventative stream.
- 64 children received fluoride varnish
- 3 children received sealants

The results from the clinics led to many families' receiving assistance with insurance navigation while also being connected to dentistry services to receive the treatment they needed. Portable services play an important role in advancing WDGPH's goal to reduce health inequities by bringing preventive care directly to children and families.

Upcoming Dental Initiatives

Looking ahead, WDGPH is preparing to implement several key initiatives:

In-School Preventive Clinics: Over the course of the 2025/26 school year, select high risk schools will be offered pilot on site preventative service clinics . These clinics will deliver cleanings, fluoride varnish, dental sealants, and education directly to children identified through school screenings and whose caregiver has enrolled them in the program.

Daycare Program Expansion: Based on the success of the pilot, additional daycare sites will be added across the region.

Strengthened Community Partnerships: Collaborations with schools, early learning centres, and local organizations will continue to support improved oral health literacy and access to care.

Health Equity Implications

These oral health initiatives directly address health inequities by reaching children who face barriers to dental care, including those in low-income families, newcomers, and rural populations.

Delivering services in schools, daycares, and community hubs ensures accessibility regardless of socioeconomic status or geography. The daycare pilot supports early prevention before school, matching WDGPB's aim to improve children's health and reduce health inequities.

Conclusion

The Oral Health Screening and Healthy Smiles Ontario programs continue to make a measurable impact on improving oral health among children in Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph.

The 2024/2025 initiatives — including daycare pilots, community-based services, and portable clinics — demonstrate WDGPB's ongoing commitment to equitable, preventive, and accessible oral health care.

Future directions include expanding in-school preventive services and scaling the daycare fluoride varnish program to additional locations.

Ontario Public Health Standards

Foundational Standards

- ☒ Population Health Assessment
- ☒ Health Equity
- ☒ Effective Public Health Practice
- ☐ Emergency Management

Program Standards

- ☒ Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being
- ☐ Food Safety
- ☐ Healthy Environments
- ☒ Healthy Growth and Development
- ☐ Immunization
- ☐ Infectious and Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control
- ☐ Safe Water
- ☒ School Health
- ☐ Substance Use and Injury Prevention

2024-2028 WDGPH Strategic Goals

More details about these strategic goals can be found in [WDGPH's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan](#).

- ☒ Improve health outcomes
- ☒ Focus on children's health
- ☒ Build strong partnerships
- ☒ Innovate our programs and services
- ☐ Lead the way toward a sustainable Public Health system