

Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

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Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

1. Receive this report for information.

Key Points

- Ontario Seniors Dental Care Program (OSDCP) resumed at the Chancellors Way office on May 26, 2021.
- An interim dentist was hired for implementation of Phase 2 for a six-month contract to provide dental care services to seniors one day per week.
- Seven community dental service providers responded to a call for Expression of Interest (EOI) to help support the OSDCP in the Wellington, Dufferin and Guelph communities.

Discussion

Background

Oral health for seniors is essential in the prevention of chronic disease development such as diabetes and heart disease. Access to professional dental care and proper oral hygiene allows for a greater quality of life.

Low-income seniors are more likely to visit a family physician and/or emergency department multiple times to access care for oral-health related conditions. Seniors are less likely to see a dentist upon retirement due to change in income thresholds and loss of dental benefits, therefore having a direct impact on their treatment needs and their overall oral health condition. This often leads to a reliance on antibiotics and pain medication to temporarily alleviate pain/discomfort, creating an unnecessary strain on the health care system.

In May 2021, the Government of Ontario announced the expansion of access to dental care for low-income seniors by increasing the income threshold for eligibility. In addition to ensuring that existing OSDCP clients remain covered under the program, this will also allow approximately 7,000 more seniors to access the OSDCP across the province this year.

Seniors are eligible to receive services under the OSDCP if they:

- Are 65 years of age or older.
- Are residents of Ontario.
- Have no access to any private or public dental benefits (including through the Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works).
- Meet Ministry-specified income eligibility thresholds. As of August 1, 2021, single residents aged 65 and over with an income of \$22,200 or less OR senior couples with a combined income of \$37,100 or less are eligible. See Table 1 below.

Table 1. LIM-AT Threshold 2021

Number of older adults 65+ meeting LIM-AT threshold in 2021 with 40% utilization rate applied.

Municipality	# of older adults in LIM-AT	Estimated # older adults served through the OSDCP (based on 40% Utilization)
Guelph	1,645	658
Centre Wellington	390	156
Orangeville	385	154
Wellington North	340	136
Minto	210	84
Erin	205	82
Mapleton	195	78
Shelburne	155	62
Puslinch	135	54
Guelph/Eramosa	125	50
Mulmer	85	34
Melancthon	75	30
Mono	60	24
Grand Valley	40	16
Amaranth	25	10
East Garafraxa	10	4
Total	4,080	1,632

Update on Capital Projects

In March 2020, the infrastructure enhancements to expand the dental clinics in the Guelph and Orangeville office locations were completed with the inclusion of x-ray capability.¹

Impact of COVID-19 on Service Delivery

Due to Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health's (WDGPH) response to the COVID-19 pandemic and re-deployment of the Oral Health Program staff, the Stage 1 OSDCP model which involved the registered dental hygienist (RDH) completing a dental screening and triaging clients based on urgent needs, was temporarily put on hold.

As a result, the cancellation of routine dental screenings led to an increase in oral health emergency calls to the Dental Intake Line leading to an influx of seniors seeking

OSDCP for emergency care. This directly impacted our already limited number of community dentists who expressed interest in treating our OSDCP emergency seniors.

Subsequently, the delayed implementation of Stage 2 (employing an OSDCP dentist on a contractual basis and hiring a RDH for the Guelph and Orangeville offices) was postponed, increasing our current waitlist to 462 clients.

Response to Capacity Constraints

In April 2021, WDGPH sent out an EOI to generate support from the dental community to assist in alleviating and managing seniors in need of emergency dental care throughout our region.

In response to the EOI, seven community dentists and one denturist agreed to see a limited number of clients. This is a result of capacity issues experienced in their own practice settings along with increased Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) measures related to COVID-19. Since July 2020, 235 OSDCP clients have been referred for emergency care to our community dentists.

In May 2021, limited general dentistry commenced on site at the Chancellors Way location, with an interim dentist providing services one day per week. A Level II dental assistant was hired to work in a dyad model alongside the dentist. To date, the dentist working at our Chancellors Way location has completed 73 appointments since May 26, 2021.

Key performance indicators for the OSDCP from WDGPH Chancellors Way clinic are included in Table 2.

Table 2: Key Performance Indicators for the OSDCP (May 26 to July 30, 2021)

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR (current as of July 30)	ACHIEVEMENT
# of Unique Clients Seen	42
# of New Patient Examinations	33
# of Emergency Examinations	13
# of Restorative Fillings	42
# of Tooth Extractions	13
# of Referrals to Oral Surgeon for complicated tooth extractions	6
# of Referrals to Denturist	11

In July 2021, a RDH was hired to provide preventive care services in the Guelph and Orangeville office locations. Provision of services will commence on August 9, 2021 at the Chancellors Way location, and on September 8 at the Orangeville office location at 180 Broadway St.

Future Service Delivery Model

The OSDCP income threshold level increase in August 2021 will add to the existing waitlist of clients attempting to access care.

WDGPH has begun the recruitment of a part-time OSDCP dentist(s) to provide client care one day per week out of the Orangeville office, and to expand existing services in the Guelph location to two days per week. This will help to increase and support timely access to the OSDCP program.

The current RDH, hired in July, will commence provision of services out of the Orangeville location one day per week in the fall of 2021.

Conclusion

Despite the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important that seniors continue to access oral health care services in a timely manner. Early prevention is key to help to address oral health issues, improve population health and help to alleviate the burden on the acute health care system.

Ontario Public Health Standard

Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being

- The board of health shall provide or ensure the provision of oral health services for enrolled OSDCP clients in accordance with the current OSDCP Schedule of Dental Services and Fees. (Page 8, Oral Health Protocol 2021).²
- The board of health shall develop and implement a program of public health interventions using a comprehensive health promotion approach that addresses chronic disease risk and protective factors to reduce the burden of illness from chronic diseases in the health unit population.

2020 WDGPH Strategic Direction(s)

Service Delivery: We will provide our programs and services in a flexible, modern and accessible manner, and will ensure they reflect the immediate needs of our Clients and our role in the broader sector.

System Transformation: We will equip the Agency for change in all aspects of our work so that we are ready for transformational system change when the time comes.

Knowledge Transfer: We will ensure that our decision-making and policy development efforts are informed by meaningful health data at all times.

Health Equity

Oral health is an important contributor to overall physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Older adults and low-income individuals are at risk of poor oral health and face greater barriers to accessing appropriate and necessary dental care in Wellington, Dufferin, and Guelph.

The OSDCP is a program that meets the oral health needs of low-income older adults. Dental care will be provided to eligible seniors without regard to insurance coverage or ability to pay. This program is intended to address oral health problems in a preventive (upstream) manner wherever possible to improve population health and reduce burden on the acute health care system.

References

1. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health. Board of Health Report BH.01.NOV0420.R16 November 2020. Available from:
https://www.wdgpulichealth.ca/sites/default/files/file-attachments/BOH/bh.01.nov0420.r16_-_ontario_seniors_dental_care_program_update.pdf
2. Ministry of Health. Ontario Public Health Standards: Protocols and Guidelines. Oral Health Protocol, 2021. Available from:
https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/protocols_guidelines/Oral%20Health%20Protocol_2021.pdf

Appendices

None.