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Federal Dental Health Plan is Good News for Seniors

The cost of dental care is one of the main reasons many older people neglect their oral health .

In the recent federal budget, the long anticipated new dental plan for seniors was announced. In 2023 the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) will become available to uninsured seniors who have an annual family income of less than \$90,000.00 and by 2025 the CDCP will be fully implemented. It seems that the federal government have conceded that good oral health is important to aging well.

Many older people neglect their oral health for a variety of reasons, but an outstanding issue appears to be the financial cost to maintaining their gums and teeth. Going to the dentist is costly and for someone on a fixed income dentistry becomes a luxury not a necessity. This issue is not unlike the issue some older people experience in trying to pay the price for their medications and at the same time paying for necessities especially with the rising cost of living for basics like food.

Oral Health Issues:

Cost of care for fixed income seniors

Teeth undergo negative changes as we age

Oral health problems can lead to other health complications

But what is good oral health and why does it matter? Apparently as we age, teeth undergo negative changes such as sensitive teeth, exposed roots, dry mouth, darker or yellower teeth and even losing teeth. Plaque builds up faster and can harden into tartar, which can be difficult to remove. These changes can be initiated or exacerbated by chronic diseases and the long-term use of medications.

Oral health problems can lead to the development of lung infections such as pneumonia. Gum disease may also increase the risk of a heart attack or stroke. It has been shown that poor oral health may increase the number of harmful bacteria found in the mouth and these may release toxins into the blood which can damage heart tissue. For those older people who have type 2 diabetes, they are at a higher level of tooth loss than other people.

Sometimes the deterioration of our teeth and gums can play a role in lowering our self esteem and may contribute to some of us reducing our social interactions and we know reducing our social connections can lead to other serious health issues. The Canadian Dental Association says that “oral health is part of your overall health. With a healthy mouth you can eat, speak, and smile in comfort, which helps you feel physically, socially, and mentally well. A healthy mouth helps you enjoy life”.



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Canadian Dental Association

While it is good news about the impending Canadian Dental Care Plan which I assume will cover the cost of dental checkups, cleaning, and other preventative strategies, there are measures that we can take immediately to maintain good oral health. Teeth and gum problems can be prevented through good oral habits like brushing at least two times a day using a soft bristled brush. Flossing regularly is a dental hygienist’s dream for her clients, at least it is for mine. Using mouth wash helps remove food particles left after brushing and flossing.

Taking good care of your teeth and mouth includes a healthy diet and limiting sugary food and drink. The October 2021 edition of On Health (by Consumer Reports) says the diet that’s good for your brain, heart, and lungs, that is a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, grains, and healthy fats is also beneficial for hearing, vision, and dental health. Additionally, they said that a 2021 study in the British Journal of Nutrition found, “that a diet low in produce and high in saturated fat and processed meats was associated with tooth loss, dry mouth, and gum disease in older age”.

A few more strategies for oral health include avoiding or limiting the use of alcohol and no smoking or vaping. These habits can lead to dry mouth and dehydration. We need a moist mouth as saliva washes away harmful acids from teeth which protects us from tooth decay. Lastly, check your mouth regularly for gum disease or cancer. The Canadian Dental Association also suggest regular check ups at the dentist.

However, some seniors without dental coverage often do not visit the dentist regularly and when they experience an emergency or major dental issue, they often turn to hospital emergency rooms. As we know, this has a huge impact on the health care system both in terms of resources and time. Now with the Canadian Dental Care Plan seniors who otherwise could not afford the “luxury” of dental visits can soon get the care they need.

Smile everyone.

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