

Waterloo Region Oral Health Coalition

The Waterloo Region Oral Health Coalition is made up of representatives from social service agencies, Waterloo Region Public Health and Waterloo Region Social Services (non-voting members), partner organizations, and people with lived experience. The coalition is supported by KDCHC, and meets four times per year to work on reducing gaps in oral health care in our community. The coalition is supported by KDCHC, and meets four times per year to work on reducing gaps in oral health care in our community. Our vision, purpose and goals are:

Vision

All residents of Waterloo Region have access to an affordable continuum of oral health services.

Purpose

The Waterloo Region Oral Health Coalition (WROHC) purpose is to support *education*, *advocacy* and *action* to increase access to affordable oral health services for individuals and families.

Goals

1. Increase awareness and navigation of existing oral health care services, including oral health promotion, disease prevention and timely access to comprehensive dental care.
2. Support the development of new initiatives by rallying existing and emerging community resources in ways that increase access to services.
3. Raise awareness about barriers to oral health care in Waterloo Region.
4. Support the development of regional and provincial policy that creates access to oral health services.
5. Work in collaboration with other oral health coalitions in Ontario to achieve goals.

The Waterloo Region Oral Health Coalition (WROHC) is working closely with other oral health coalitions in Ontario (many of them hosted by Community Health Centres) to increase access to dental care, and advocating together with the leadership of the Ontario Oral Health Alliance (OOHA) at a provincial level to reduce disparities in oral health.

Background – KDCHC health equity priorities

In 2015 KDCHC consulted with our clients, volunteers, community partners and staff to identify priorities for our health equity work. Through this process we identified broad consensus amongst our stakeholders that there are gaps in health and other supports in the following areas:

- Oral health care – Many people in our community cannot afford to pay to see a dentist or access other oral health care supports.
- Pharmacare – Many people in our community cannot afford medication that is prescribed for them.

Our stakeholders also identified that poverty is an underlying determinant of health that KDCHC should address by supporting poverty reductions efforts in our community.

Forming the Oral Health Coalition

KDCHC determined that the best way to build awareness of gaps and advocate for increased access to oral health care was to work together with individuals and partners in the community. We were also inspired by other regions of the province where there are oral health coalitions working together with the leadership of the Ontario Oral Health Alliance (OOHA).

In 2016 KDCHC hosted an Oral Health Forum to start off the development of the Waterloo Region Oral Health Coalition. The forum featured guest speaker Dr. Carlos Quinonez, Associate Professor in Dental Public Health at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Dentistry. Dr. Quinonez presented compelling information about the gaps in oral health care in Ontario. Many people in Ontario have limited or no access to dental care due to lack of income. The forum was attended by individuals representing many different organizations who had the opportunity to discuss gaps in dental care and advise KDCHC on the formation of the coalition.

Following this meeting, KDCHC held the first meeting of the Waterloo Region Oral Health Coalition. Representatives from social service agencies, Waterloo Region Public Health, and other organizations, and people with lived experience, met to approve terms of reference and begin working together to address gaps in oral health care.

Action to date

Petition to Legislative Assembly of Ontario – Expand Public Dental Programs

The coalition members worked to collect signatures on a petition to expand public dental programs in Ontario. In Dec. 2016 we met with Kitchener MPP Daiene Vernile to deliver 1300 signatures and urge the government to expand public dental programs. Daiene Vernile tabled our 1300 signatures on petitions in the legislature in March 2017. Minister of Health and Long Term Care Dr. Eric Hoskins responded in letter to say "...the ministry has committed to making dental benefits available to all low-income Ontarians. Given the magnitude of this commitment, the ministry has committed to implementation by 2025 and is currently focussing on children and youth as a first priority." To date in Ontario 40 MPPs (of 107) met with and petition tabled 50+ times (still being tabled). OOHA may hold press conference at Queens Park in February to wrap up petition campaign and formally announce our election asks.

Municipal Resolution to Expand Access to Oral Health Care for Adults with Low Income

The coalition presented the following resolution to the Council of the Municipality of Region of Waterloo:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT COUNCIL OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF REGION OF WATERLOO:

Strongly endorses the importance of oral health and requests that the Premier of Ontario include oral health as part of the government's primary care transformation initiatives, and further, That Council calls on the provincial government to expand public oral health programs with prime consideration for low income adults and seniors, and further, That Council forwards copies of this resolution to the Premier of Ontario, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Local Members of Provincial Parliament, Member Municipalities, and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

Council unanimously supported the resolution Apr. 12, 2017. Council sent a letter (resolution enclosed) to Premier Kathleen Wynne on Apr. 18, 2017, cc'ing local MPPs and the Minister of Health and Long Term Care, Dr. Eric Hoskins. The Premier e-mailed Council on Apr. 20th indicating she sent a copy of Council's resolution to Dr. Eric Hoskins.

Current initiatives

The Oral Health Coalition continues to work with OOHA and other coalitions in the province to advocate for the expansion of public dental programs. We will also be working locally to raise awareness about gaps in oral health care and engage the community in supporting our efforts to achieve our vision: *All residents of Waterloo Region have access to an affordable continuum of oral health services.*

Do you have difficulty paying for oral health care? Get Involved!

KDCHC is interested in strengthening the coalition with information and participation from people who have lived experience of barriers to oral health care. If you are an adult and senior are struggling to afford dental care and are interested in working on this gap in health care, please contact us by phone: Doug Rankin 519-745-4404 ext. 207 or e-mail: drankin@kdchc.org.