

Gaps in oral health care in Ontario and Waterloo Region

What is the problem?

- Low income adults and seniors who have no dental benefits often can't afford oral health care
- Dental care is almost entirely privately financed in Ontario and across Canada with about 50% paid through employer-provided benefits programs and 44% paid out of pocket
- A small portion is publicly-funded by the federal government (NIHB, IFHP, Veterans) by the provincial government (HSO) and by municipalities (discretionary benefits for OW and ODSP dental benefits)

What does dental care cost?

- Dental care costs are: new patient exam \$480, recall visit \$240, filling \$120-315, root canal and crown restoration \$1925 (ODA fee guide – examples only)

How many people are affected?

- Studies have found that an estimated 17 per cent of people in Ontario have not visited a dentist in the past year, with the main reason being the cost of private dental care
- 10% of Waterloo Region residents reported that they've turned down or refused necessary dental treatment because they didn't have insurance (population 535,000 in 2016)

What populations are affected?

- In Waterloo Region segments of the population experience a disproportionate burden of oral diseases: Individuals with low income, refugees and immigrants, Low German speaking Mennonites from Mexico, people who are homeless and long-term care residents

What is the cost?

- Every 9 minutes, a person in Ontario visits the ER for a dental problem
- There were 61,000 ER visits in Ontario in 2015 at a cost of \$31 million
- This included 1,295 visits to Waterloo region's three hospitals at a cost of \$664,000, over half of which were urgent/potentially serious
- In 2014 there were over 220,000 physician visits in Ontario at a cost of \$7.5 million
- This included 9527 visits in the Waterloo Wellington LHIN area at a cost of \$321,000
- Physicians are not qualified to treat dental problems; the most they can do is prescribe painkillers and antibiotics which only resolves the issue temporarily

What is the impact?

- Oral health disease causes pain and suffering that often goes untreated due to cost
- Oral health disease increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, respiratory diseases (pneumonia and asthma) and pre term and low birth weight babies. Poor oral health can lead to difficulties eating causing poor nutrition affecting overall health
- Poor oral health can negatively impact a person's dignity and self-respect, result in stigma and low self esteem, impacting employability, and resulting in isolation and a negative impact on mental health

Oral health care is a priority in Waterloo Region

- In Apr. 2017 Waterloo Region Council sent a letter to Premier Kathleen Wynne and the Minister of Health and Long Term Care, Dr. Eric Hoskins, asking them to expand public oral health programs with prime consideration for low income adults and seniors
- In Waterloo Region adults have more dental social assistance benefits than most regions of the province – people on OW are eligible for emergency and essential dental treatment and denture program, and adults on ODSP with basis dental treatment (provincial program) are also eligible for denture coverage
- In 2016, the Region of Waterloo provided \$1.7 million in funding above and beyond the amount cost shared with the province for oral health discretionary benefits.